



# THE SHŌGUN'S SOLDIERS

The Daily Life of Samurai and Soldiers in  
Edo Period Japan, 1603–1721 Volume 2

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MICHAEL FREDHOLM VON ESSEN

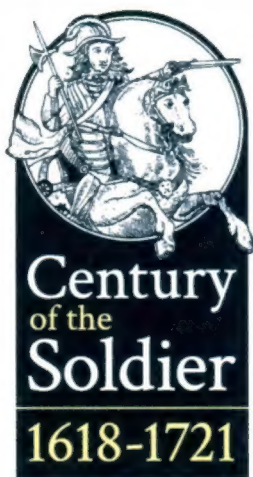


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Japan, 1603–1721 Volume 2

**Michael Fredholm von Essen**

'This is the Century of the Soldier', Fulvio Testi, Poet, 1641



**Helion & Company**

Dedicated to Per-Olow Leijon (1938–2011), Senior Curator, China and Japan,  
of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities and the National Museum of  
Ethnography, Stockholm

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**Plate 1. Samurai officer in civilian  
*haori* coat and fireman's helmet**

(Illustration by Georgio Albertini

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Armed with the samurai's two swords, the officer carries more armour than is apparent from a casual glance, including breastplate, armoured sleeves, and shin guards.

# Preface

In the first volume of *The Shôgun's Soldiers*, we saw how the long period of civil wars which had characterised Japan for generations ended with Tokugawa Ieyasu's victorious campaign and decisive battle of Sekigahara in 1600, in which an eastern army defeated a coalition of predominantly western lords. The battle confirmed Ieyasu's position of military supremacy, resulted in his assumption in 1603 of the position of *shôgun* (generalissimo) of Japan, and inaugurated what nowadays is known as the Edo period (1600–1868), so named because Ieyasu after the battle established his capital in Edo (modern-day Tôkyô).

However, we also saw how the government of Japan – the shogunate – in 1635 because of a perception of military weakness retreated into enforced seclusion, a seclusion aided by the geographical situation of the Japanese islands. Ocean-going ships were prohibited, and Japanese subjects were forbidden from leaving the country or, having left it, ever to return. The seclusion laws were rigorously enforced. As the Age of Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent global expansion of the European nations transformed the world, Japan chose isolation and stagnation.

This policy resulted in significant military and social change. After 1615, the shôgun's soldiers were no longer needed for war. A Tokugawa army of sorts still existed, since technically there was no demobilisation. However, with no more wars to fight, the shôgun's soldiers in all but name became townsmen. They retained samurai status but were no longer called up to fight. As a result, a transition from warrior to townsman took place. While the Tokugawa shogunate, on paper, retained a large army, in reality it was no longer there. Many samurai and soldiers neglected their military training. Most samurai, even those who remained on active duty, reduced, or even discarded, the armour they were supposed to wear for protection. Most warriors did not need it, since any fighting for which they might be called up usually was akin to police action rather than battlefield operations. Those samurai eager for a career of physical action instead served as police officers, a profession which still relied on combat skills, or firemen, a duty which was held in high regard and, moreover, was seen as more honourable than service in law enforcement.

Yet organised and often violent crime, together with gambling, was commonplace in Edo period Japan, and these are further described in this volume. Other topics include schools, education and training, the effects of religion on warrior and ex-warrior society, and how samurai and soldiers entertained themselves with music, theatres and variety theatres, books and cartoons, but also the 'Floating World' of prostitution and brothel districts.

The transition from soldier to police officer or fireman mirrored the general transition in Japan from warrior to townsman society. This book continues our description of this transition, and of how the shôgun's soldiers lived their lives in the long period of peace which was the Edo period.



**Plate 2. Samurai policeman  
(*dôshin*) in civilian kimono  
and breeches (*momohiki*), tied  
beneath the knees**

(Illustration by Georgio Albertini  
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Armed with two swords and *jitte*, he is well protected by chainmail and brigandine armour under his civilian clothes and a reinforced forehead guard attached to the ubiquitous headcloth (*hachimaki*) across the forehead. In addition, he has tied up his wide sleeves with a cloth band to facilitate combat.



# Education, Sports, and Religion

## Schools and Education

### The Educational System

Japan had a long tradition of educational institutions. Schools had been established by the Imperial court and by noble families as early as the Heian period (794–1185), and at least one of these, the Ashikaga Gakkō, remained in existence in 1600, although by then it was little more than a school for priests.

In the Edo period, the educational outlook for boys and girls was quite different. Schooling outside the home was by no means universal, and it has been estimated that even at the end of the period, by 1868, only 43 percent of the boys and 10 percent of the girls in Japan attended three to four years of some form of school outside their homes.<sup>1</sup> School attendance was not uniform throughout the country, however. Edo, Ōsaka, Kyōto and their surrounding districts had the highest rate of attendance, while northern Japan and Kyūshū lagged considerably behind. This was especially true of girls' education. Another study estimates that the educational system counted only 40 girls for every 100 boys in Edo, 30 in the Ōsaka-Kyōto region, 20 in western Japan, and as few as five in the north-east.<sup>2</sup>

In all lordly domains (*han*) except the smallest, samurai boys attended official domain schools (*hankō*), run for the boys of their particular fief. The only exceptions were the sons of samurai of the highest ranks, for instance the shōgun and the great lords, who were provided with private teaching although in more or less the same subjects as in the domain schools. It is very difficult to determine the number and establishment dates of the domain schools. The first known domain school was perhaps the one established in 1636 in the castle town of Morioka (now Iwate Prefecture), but at least two others may have been formed as early as in the 1620s. By the end of the

1 Ronald P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) pp.317–22.

2 Dore, *Education*, p.254; citing Ken Ishikawa, *Terakoya* (Tōkyō: Shibundō, 1960), p.152.

Fig. 1 An exhibition of writing in a school of the type known as *terakoya*.



seventeenth century, the number of domain schools was about 20 to 55; by the end of the Edo period, their number was well over 200.

The organisation of the domain schools varied from place to place. Attendance was usually not strictly compulsory, although in some places it was. Education could start at the age of six, although entrance at age seven or eight was more common. Most students completed their courses of study between the ages of 15 and 20. If the student continued after this age, he himself would be involved in the teaching of young boys. The exceptionally gifted student could thus stay on into his thirties. Nonetheless, the schools depended almost entirely on professional teachers.

One crucial factor in tutoring samurai boys was the desire not to harm the pupil's dignity. Loss of face had to be avoided at all costs, especially in the presence of other boys, some of whom might be of lower rank. For this reason, most schools operated on the principle that the students had short



sessions of individual tutoring and testing, followed by significantly longer periods for study and preparation before the tests. For more general subjects, lectures were held, in which the students were expected to keep quiet and show an appearance of intelligent interest, whether they understood or not. The student's performance was therefore a private matter between himself and the teacher, never exposed to public view. Regular attendance and good conduct were valued equally high, indeed at times even higher, than actual scholastic performance. Although many schools organised high-level discussion groups, attendance at these was generally voluntary, and only those who had a real confidence in their abilities would attend.

As an example of a domain school, let us look at one of the first of them, the Keikodô. This school was officially established in 1664, when the domain assumed control of a private school hitherto mainly attended by the children of merchants. From 1674 the school only accepted samurai sons. The school later developed into the Nisshinkan domain school, established in Aizu in 1803. We know enough about the activities of the school at this time to get an idea of the curriculum. The students, all of them sons of samurai (by 1820, even lesser samurai were forbidden to attend), entered the school at the age of 10. During the first six to seven years, they were in primary school. The students then mainly studied reading and understanding (Fig. 1).

The day began with reading studies from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. From 10:00 to 12:00 noon, the students studied calligraphy and etiquette. Finally, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m., they studied the martial arts, such as archery, swordsmanship, spear fighting, and horsemanship. The students were divided into four groups, each of which was subdivided into two classes of about 14 to 15 students. The primary school was followed by a secondary school. Excellent students could then be sent to study in Edo or Nagasaki. The Nisshinkan school also taught Dutch Studies (*rangaku*), in which European science was studied. This included subjects such as astronomy and medicine.

The school employed examinations to pass from the lowest grade (fourth *tô*) to the highest grade (first *tô*). An interesting feature of this school was that certain students were required to pass a particular grade. An elder son of a family of a *koku* rating of less than 300 *koku*, as well as junior sons of families of more than 300 *koku*, had to reach third *tô*. The eldest son of a family of from 300–500 *koku* had to reach second *tô*. The eldest son of a family of more than 500 *koku* had to reach first *tô*. As scholarly accomplishments not necessarily depended on the order of birth, this required a few unfortunate elder sons to study until they reached 35 years of age. Younger sons, however, were excused after reaching the age of 21.

As the basic philosophy of teaching, if not its practical application, had been imported from China, Japanese schools often included an examination system. The successful were awarded prizes, but in contradiction to Chinese practices, competition was not encouraged. After all, the student's later position would be determined solely by his birth rather than by success or lack thereof in studies. Indeed, the student presumably knew that as long as he was born in the right family, mere ignorance, stupidity, or inefficiency at school was never sufficient cause to prevent him from receiving his future post. Although the shogunate insisted on certain requirements for a limited

number of official posts, these posts were always very few in number and in any case only open to certain high-ranking samurai families, all of them personal retainers of the shôgun.

The leading educational institution of Edo period Japan was the Shôhei Academy. This was the centre of Confucian ritual and classical studies, and served as a university for the Tokugawas, closely allied great lords (the descendants of those who had supported Tokugawa Ieyasu at the crucial battle of Sekigahara), and the *hatamoto* class. In 1792, the shogunate held its first open examination as an incentive to encourage study among the samurai in general. With time, the examination system grew into an elaborate system of grades and standards of proficiency. Written examinations (in addition to oral ones) were held every three years, in imitation of the Chinese state examination system. At least by 1793, selected commoners were admitted to the Academy, but only those were eligible who already had attained a reasonable level of scholarship, shown special promise, and planned to devote their lives to scholarship and give up the family trade. The shogunate needed professional scholars and teachers.

The attendance at the domain schools was considered a military duty for the warrior class, and the samurai boys therefore found themselves under military discipline, similar to the adults. The schools were therefore not financed out of fees, although formal personal gifts to individual teachers were always expected. The students only paid for their food if boarding at the school, and even such payments were not universal. The charge for food was not low, however. By the end of the Edo period when many samurai students were subsisting on an allowance of half a *ryô* of gold per month (which, it should be remembered, was less than the salary of a regular clerk), the meal cost was as high as seven-sixteenths of a *ryô* per person per month. This left very little cash for other expenses, of which there were many, including not only regular living expenses but also social requirements. Whenever anyone left the dormitory, the students had a farewell party at a local restaurant, which cost another one-sixteenth *ryô*. Then there were all the required gifts. Numerous students had to take odd jobs as copyists to earn more cash.

Young girls of the samurai class did not attend school. Instead they learned whatever they needed at home, from the women of the household.

Most commoners who attended school did so in a village school. A few were admitted to the domain schools. Some 17 domains are known late in the period to have admitted commoners into their domain schools. A village school was sometimes run as a charity, or it could be a cooperative effort by the villagers. Another means of village education was older retired men, usually rich farmers or headmen, who often taught in exchange for gifts of gratitude from the parents. In other places, the village school was a private enterprise. Such a school was known as *terakoya*, the word derived from the older word *terako* ('temple child'). Formerly, the priests had provided whatever formal education was available. By the Edo period, the word *terako* seems to have acquired the more general meaning of 'school child'. A *terakoya* was then merely any house or shop that accepts pupils in exchange for payment. The word *terakoya* was chiefly used in western Japan. In Edo and its surrounding

area, these schools were usually called *tenarai-sho*, 'hand-learning schools' or 'writing schools'.

In Edo and the towns, there were no schools in the proper sense of the word. Instead tutors were available. These could come from almost any background but were united by the necessity to make a living out of schoolteaching. Masterless or impoverished samurai, the physically disabled, widows, spinsters (many of whom had spent so long in service at a great lord's mansion that their age and excessive refinement had spoiled their chances of marriage), divorced women, and members of a few families who had teaching as their hereditary occupation and often were Confucian scholars, all these groups were common as teachers. In Edo, about a third of all known teachers were women. A few *terakoya*, especially those run by samurai, accepted mainly or only samurai children.

Some teachers also made part of their living as scribes, drawing up official applications and legal documents for a fee. This demanded special skills, as members of the warrior class in particular constantly had to present applications for permission to do this or that, and their applications were commonly rejected by petty-minded superiors if they failed to conform to the standard phraseology in some minor matter or if the handwriting was not quite good enough. These teachers also at times taught calligraphy to adults who needed or wished to improve their style.

Most *terakoya* were run as the family business of a single teacher or a married couple, possibly assisted by one or two senior pupils. The school building also served as the teacher's home. In Edo, one third were run by women. Most schools had from 30 to 50 or 60 pupils, while a few – the largest ones and less than 10 percent of the total number – had 100 or more pupils and relied on employed teachers. It has been estimated that there were about 800 such schoolmasters in Edo in the eighteenth century, each of whom taught about 50 pupils. If so, and this estimate is based on very doubtful figures mentioned in a letter written in 1722, only a small proportion of the Edo children attended school. Another source of 1810 refers to two or three teachers in every neighbourhood in Edo, but also points out that not long time before there used to be hardly any. Although we cannot estimate the exact number of tutors and pupils, it seems clear that the number of both grew rapidly from the end of the eighteenth century.

Schools and tutors for commoners did not purport to offer vocational training and nobody expected a child to rise in the world by gaining an education, an idea indeed regarded as pointless or even morally reprehensible in the highly stratified Edo period society. Besides, family crafts and vocational training were learnt at home. The tutors instead saw as their duty to teach the merits of keeping to one's place in the proper order of things. Obedience, responsibility, and correct attitudes to one's neighbours were constantly exhorted. Writing practice was the main subject, and the pupils were supposed to copy standard works of letters or other suitable texts. The pupils regularly put their work on exhibition. The parents then came to admire the work, help with and naturally also partake of refreshments, and, most importantly, give the teacher a suitable gift.



Curiously, the regular fees of the tutor were often left to the discretion of the parents. Scholarship was regarded as a reward in itself, and Confucian thought demanded that the scholar did his duty to society. Extra expenses were charged, however, for instance for charcoal used for heating in winter and money to cover the expense of changing the tatami mats in summer. Any extra payments to the teacher were considered expressions of gratitude, presented disguised in gift wrappings on the various gift-giving occasions or other holidays (when the teacher for his part had to provide sweets for his pupils) and on the twice-yearly school examinations, rather than actual remuneration. Proper gifts were also expected at the new year and at the boys' and girls' festivals. Gifts were also required when a child initially entered the school. At least until the mid eighteenth century, proper ceremony upon entering was strictly observed. The parents of the child had to acquire formal clothes, gifts to the teacher and the other pupils (commonly a writing brush, a small bundle of writing paper, or some sweets, presented both as a courtesy and to establish good relations), and pastry and sake for the bond ceremony between teacher and pupil. The new pupil also needed a desk (usually acquired secondhand), paper, writing brushes, and ink. The numerous expenses were indeed one reason why only a few children attended school.

As the entrance ceremonies were increasingly simplified and gradually dispensed with, and education grew less formal, the costs of attending school decreased. The number of teachers (some of dubious quality) increased, too. This helped to create the educational boom from the end of the eighteenth century. By then, the teacher apparently always demanded a minimum fee for his services. In the 1830s, the cheapest and most decrepit schools charged four copper *mon* per day and student. The value of the education provided by such schools was limited. Four *mon* was nothing for the well-to-do townsman, but it was still a substantial amount for the really poor. According to one estimate, a teacher with 200 pupils might expect an income of about 20 *koku*, or equivalent to the lower ranks of samurai. A teacher with 100 pupils was comfortably provided for, but with fewer than 50 pupils, he would have a hard time supporting himself and his family. In the villages, monetary payments remained uncommon. The teacher, however, expected numerous small gifts and assistance with non-teaching work from grateful villagers. Such a teacher was, in effect, employed by his village and – as an important personage of the community, well treated.

It is highly probable that more daughters of merchants went to school than girls of other classes. This was not only because of the greater financial resources of the merchants, but also because women played a considerable role in the running of shops and businesses. Although the head of the family naturally made most decisions, it was customary for the wife to see to customers and clients whenever her husband was unavailable. Although the largest businesses often employed paid managers, and most had clerks and other assistants, the wife of the owner still wielded considerable influence and authority. It was therefore advantageous for the daughter of a merchant to learn how to read and write, so that she could handle correspondence and accounts.

There were also other private schools and academies called *shijuku* or *juku* that provided advanced instruction in a variety of disciplines. By the end of the Edo period, there were at least 1,500 private academies throughout Japan. At least 80 such schools – and presumably more – existed in Edo. These accepted both samurai and commoners. Academies were founded by individual scholars or instructors specifically for the teaching of some particular skill, a particular doctrine of (usually Confucian) philosophy, or a martial art. The teacher's own home was used as classroom, and standards were generally high. Students came from all parts of the country, bearing suitable gifts and asking to become the teacher's disciple (*deshi*). Dutch studies, too, took place in such establishments.

Especially in the early part of the Edo period, many academies were flourishing schools of the various martial arts, including the arts of tactics and strategy. Such establishments were often attended by hundreds of disciples. These came from all ranks in the warrior class, from minor feudal lords to *hatamoto* and down to the leaders of foot soldiers. Many teachers and students were masterless samurai, as martial arts academies provided a natural meeting place for unemployed warriors.

### The Student

The student in Edo period Japan, especially if a member of the samurai class, had to master several different subjects of study. The main purpose of samurai education was to develop moral character, an obligation to fulfil the function of the samurai class in society. The means to achieve this goal was to read the Confucian classics and possibly some other Chinese writings. Such study also achieved the secondary purpose of gaining a proper knowledge of the principles of government and other information that was considered necessary for the proper performance of the samurai's duties. Towards the end of the Edo period, some technical vocational skills such as basic fiscal arithmetic, administrative methods, ceremonies, protocol, and some knowledge of irrigation techniques were commonly added to the curriculum.

Much importance was attached to the ability to read Chinese writing (*kanbun*). Although the Japanese language is completely different from Chinese, the Chinese written characters (*kanji*) had been imported along with the various other aspects of Chinese civilisation as early as in the sixth and seventh centuries. In Japan, a way of writing subsequently developed in which grammatical endings were added to the basic Chinese characters so that the written language could be used for Japanese. However, the upper classes kept the ancient Chinese classics in high regard, and to read them in their original versions, the average educated Japanese had to memorise a number of conventions. This included reading the characters in a different order from that in which they appeared in the text. In the Chinese original, the word order is typically subject, verb, object, something that had to be inverted to conform to the Japanese word order of subject, object, verb. It was also necessary to add Japanese grammatical endings that did not exist in the Chinese texts. When reading a Chinese text following these rules, the language sounded nothing like Chinese but rather like very stilted Japanese. Nonetheless, such language was intelligible to the trained person. The

samurai had to learn the Chinese classics and the works of Confucian and Neo-Confucian ethics as a formal preparation for government service. For the writing of official court and shogunate records, a hybrid form of literary Japanese combining both Chinese and Japanese elements (*hentai-kanbun*, 'variant Chinese') was used.

The Chinese classics emphasised loyalty to superiors, the need for decorum and proper behaviour, and encouraged a strong feeling of superiority among the samurai. Other important subjects, such as calligraphy and the rules of etiquette, also served to emphasise these factors. How to behave towards somebody of superior rank, proper table manners, correct posture, and so on formed an important part of samurai culture. Respectfulness and loyalty to superiors, fairness to inferiors, dignity and correctness as well as a moralistic approach to success and money were traits encouraged in the young samurai.<sup>3</sup>

The reading of Chinese and the writing of Japanese were normally considered separate activities. Many domain schools in fact regarded the writing of Japanese as a much inferior activity that should not be taught in a proper school. Many children therefore had to learn how to write their own language from private teachers. Only women relied on Japanese books as the most suitable means of education. Proper scholars therefore – with great logic – noted that the contents of a Japanese book by definition must be inferior to the contents of a Chinese book.

In the class room, the learning process consisted almost entirely of copying texts under the supervision of the teacher. Most beginning copy-books (for writing Japanese and not reading Chinese) consisted of the syllabary, lists of numbers, place names, characters commonly used for personal names, and poems written in the phonetic script. Other copy-books were old (and hardly understandable) collections of letters. There were also more useful epistolary handbooks (*shôsoku ôrai*, meaning something like 'exchange of letters for the inquiry of health') that listed suitably polite phrases and seasonal greetings, as well as sample letters and instructions on how to address, fold, and seal the letter.

Most instruction was in writing. When reading Chinese, the pupil was kept busy copying moral texts until they were learned by heart. Each student was sitting behind a desk, and for this purpose provided with an ink-stone and a copy-book. As paper was expensive, it was used again and again until each sheet was ebony black, and only the dampness and hence relative blackness of the ink made the new writing temporarily legible. The coarse paper on which the pupil practised was usually bound into a notebook. The pupil was customarily entitled to some rest and play after going through the entire notebook, while it dried, so that practise could start all over again. Brushes of various sizes were kept in a round holder, often made of bamboo.

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3 In modern Japan, many companies and all department stores still train their employees in, for example, how to bow correctly to a customer, client, or superior. The use of correct and different language to superiors and inferiors remains a requirement in polite society.



The schools devised several methods to prevent pupils from wasting too much time amusing themselves. Some schools, for instance, had a wooden privy tablet without which pupils were not allowed to leave the room. Thus only one at a time could go, and there was little risk that several pupils would use the occasion as an excuse to meet and play outside the school building.

Most schools had regular scales of punishment for misdemeanours, but punishments were rarely severe. Apparently most teachers relied more on the feeling of shame and guilt on the part of the student rather than on fear of the punishment itself. Detention was a common chastisement, and the student had to stand in a corner or on a desk, sometimes with a cup of tea or water in one hand and a burning stick of incense to measure the duration of the punishment in the other. Beating with a fan wrapped in stiff paper, producing loud noise but less pain, was also a useful chastisement.

The young samurai boys were of course also taught the basics of how to use weapons of various kinds and especially the sword. The martial arts were not all physical; theoretical subjects such as the art of strategy and tactics were also required learning. Among the samurai, the typical day of study has been described in the previous chapter. Here discipline was – at least among the older students – comparably more strict. It should be remembered, however, that most samurai had already received elementary education at home from private tutors, before they were sent to domain school. *Terakoya* pupils were generally much younger.

In the *terakoya* of the commoners, most pupils began their studies at the age of six, but sometimes already from five or even when older than 10. Boys studied for four years, while girls studied for five years or more. The school day typically lasted from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Common subjects were writing, reading, and the use of the abacus. More specialised subjects which could appear in the curriculum included the tea ceremony and etiquette. Girls in particular often studied sewing and flower arrangement.

Young girls of the samurai class did not as a rule attend school. Too much learning was thought to debase a girl's character. Instead a girl learned whatever she needed at home, from the women of the household. Most important were the practical skills of housekeeping, sewing and weaving (necessary for even the daughter of a great lord, as the skill was considered an essential element of femininity, whether the woman would ever sew or not), and being a good wife. Indeed, the entire process was aimed to produce a young woman who could be of use to the men to whom she owed her loyalty, at first her father, then her husband, and finally her eldest son, and also to the women superior to her, such as her lord's wife and daughters, and most important, her future mother-in-law.

To endear her to the men, certain social skills were also required. Visiting teachers provided instruction in subjects such as literature, writing, incense ceremony (*kôdô*), flower arrangement (*ikebana*), the tea ceremony, dance, song, and music such as the playing of the *koto* (a zither or horizontal harp), sewing, and the social graces of traditional ritual. Samurai girls also learnt to write and to read the classical Japanese novels and poetry. Flower arrangement or *kadô* ('the way of the flowers') in the seventeenth century

Fig. 2. Two typical school students, engaging in customary behaviour.



turned into an art in which a number of schools were founded. Thence flower arrangement was part of the education of all well-raised women.

The mother in a commoner's family taught her daughter to cook, sew, and wash, while a boy learnt the required skills for his trade from his father. This, among merchants, included the use of the abacus for doing the accounts. Alternatively, the boy was sent to learn a trade by serving as apprentice to another craftsman. A girl's upbringing was also a preparation for her marriage. Not only did she learn the household skills required of a wife, she also had to learn how to adjust to her future husband's household. It was, of course, also important that she learned to satisfy her husband, who could easily divorce her. Instruction may even have been provided in sexual technique, a number of manuals of which existed in Japanese society. Not only was it good for the peace within the family if the husband spent his nights at home, it was also, perhaps of more importance to a merchant, a necessity for the family's economic well-being.

As a curiosity, it may be mentioned that in most contemporary pictures of village schools, the pupils all behave in an unruly manner, while the teacher sits serene, apparently without noticing the debacle going on around him (Fig. 2). This, however, may have been far from the truth. It has been recorded that teachers habitually punished offending schoolboys by rapping them on the knuckles with a fan.

## Sports and Games

### Sports

Sports in the modern sense of the word did not really exist in Edo. Sumô wrestling was widely popular, but the origin of sumô had religious overtones, seen even today in for instance the tournament arranged by the Yasukuni shrine. Sumô also enjoyed the patronage of the Imperial court. Sports for

ordinary mortals, such as samurai and townsmen, were in fact impossible in the modern sense. A commoner was supposed to work whenever awake, and sport was considered a waste of time and money. The lower-ranking samurai naturally practised the various martial arts, but this was considered his occupation. Sports, in its modern sense as a leisure activity, only existed among samurai of high rank and the court nobles in Kyôto.

High-ranking samurai did learn certain martial arts, especially swordsmanship and archery, but as the country was at peace, this inevitably took on the form of a hobby rather than professional training. Bamboo swords and protective clothing consisting of masks and parts of body armour were developed to make the training less dangerous. Others turned what had originally been fighting skills into forms of art. Indeed, for this social class, martial arts were undertaken in exactly the same spirit as, for instance, the tea ceremony, poetry, and flower arrangement. Not essential in any way for a successful life, these hobbies were still practiced with great earnestness and with a constant search for inner significance. Every martial or artistic pursuit was organised into a school, each tracing its line of masters back to an original founder. One learnt from authorised teachers of the proper school only, and the rules were strict, so that no school would become mixed up with another. The differences between two schools of the same pursuit were often quite small, and frequently a matter of form only. Although the different schools of swordsmanship shared the same goal, and looked more or less the same to a layman, they taught different methods and often emphasised different philosophical ideas on the significance of the art.

The leading person in the realm in any art was called *tenka-ichi* ('best below heaven'). Certain such positions were hereditary, depending on the Imperial court or the shogunate court, but most were self-appointed. Craftsmen commonly used signs with this meaning (for instance, *fude tenka-ichi*, 'the best manufacturer of writing brushes in the realm') as advertisements. Fencing masters, too, used to put up such a sign to proclaim themselves the most skilful swordsman in Japan. If nobody successfully challenged the claim, his rank was regarded as confirmed.

Senior samurai also enjoyed hunting. Although the taking of life was contrary to the teachings of Buddhism, hunting for food had been commonplace before the Edo period and to some extent remained of importance even later. Hunting did not, of course, occur within Edo itself. Individual high-ranking samurai or large hunting parties commanded by great lords would set out

Fig. 3. The ancient game of *kemari*.



for the country, armed with longbows and arrows or matchlock muskets. Falconry was also quite popular from time to time. If a great lord led the hunt, he and his chief retainers remained on horseback, shooting at the deer or boars that lower samurai and local farmers drove towards them. It was all rather similar to upper-class hunting in Europe. Horse racing was another favourite pastime among some samurai and court nobles, especially those involved in the by then largely ceremonial guard duty at the Imperial court. Horse racing, however, was intended more as an occupational practice than a sport.

An ancient but still favourite sport of the nobles was *kemari* (Fig. 3), a ball game similar to soccer. This game had become an amusement of the nobility already in the tenth century, but the Jesuit Rodrigues points out that the sport also had spread to the ordinary people and even to monks and priests.<sup>4</sup> The participants of a *kemari* game stand in a rough circle. An inflated ball made of deerskin is kicked into the air and kept moving from player to player, without touching the ground. The use of hands is not allowed. For practical purposes, the players generally gather in a circle while playing. On his right foot, each player wears a certain type of shoe with a blunt point, with which he kicks the ball upwards. The game is of Chinese origin. In China, it was known as *t'su chu* and played at least since the third century BC. Similar games were, and are, played all over South-East Asia. In Malay, the game is known as *sepak raga*, and in Thai, *takraw*.

The Edo period dilettante devoted much time and seriousness to his favourite pursuit. He felt that he must acquire all possible accoutrements of his hobby 'without paying any regard for their price and sparing no effort. For they declare that nobody can truthfully say that he is ... fond of something, or practice an art ... if he allows himself to be overcome by difficulties and does not do everything possible, with the result that he fails to obtain what he so greatly desires.'<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 4. Walking on stilts.



### Toys and Games

Children in Edo, as children elsewhere, enjoyed playing various types of games, many of them with interesting toys. Many boisterous games were of the type common all over the world, such as hide-and-seek, blind man's buff, and tag. Quite a few had interesting names such as the 'fox woman from the mountain' or 'hunting for hidden treasure.' A hopping game was appropriately known as the 'one-legged cripples.' A typical boys' game was 'riding the high-stepping bamboo horse' (walking on stilts, Fig. 4). Other common games included cat's cradle, handball, and riding the hobby horse (Fig. 5).

Common toys included kites, balls, stilts, dolls, tops, yo-yos, and toy weapons. The toy shops of Japan were famous for their variety. In 1858, Laurence Oliphant related:

4 João Rodrigues, *This Island of Japon*. Translated and edited by Michael Cooper, S. J. (Tôkyô: Kodansha, 1973), p.301.

5 Rodrigues, *This Island*, p.276. This shows that the sentiments of hobbyists have changed little over time and cultural divides.



We examined the toy-shops (of Asakusa) on our way back, and bought wonderful jacks-in-the-box; representations of animals, beautifully executed in straw; models of *norimons*<sup>6</sup> and Japanese houses, as neatly finished as Swiss models; figures, some of them more humorous than decent, carved in wood; little porcelain figures, whose heads wagged and tongues shot out unexpectedly; tortoises, whose head, legs, and tail were in perpetual motion, ludicrous picture-books, grotesque masks and sham head-dresses of both sexes.<sup>7</sup>

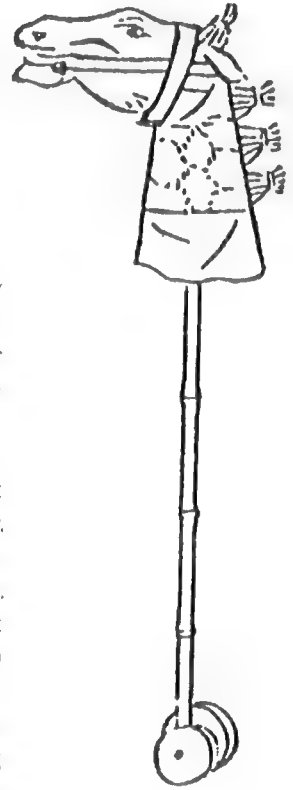


Fig. 5. The hobby horse

Dolls made of wood, straw, or rags were among the first toys received by a young child. For slightly older children, many other types of dolls were available. Most common were maybe the *hadaka ningyô* ('naked dolls'), for which the child had to sew clothes. Mechanical dolls that could move were also popular, and not only among children.

Some games and toys were unique to Japan. Many such games were associated with the various religious and seasonal festivals. Most important were maybe those associated with the start of the new year. One such game was playing with tops (*koma*). Tops were common in South-East Asia, too, and it is hard to determine the origin of the game. Another popular game was known as *hanetsuki* (Fig. 6). It was somewhat similar to badminton but played with decorated battledores (*hagoita*) and a shuttlecock (*hane*) made of a soapberry seed and attached bird feathers. The game was played without the use of a net. In Japan, the game was played mainly by children. During the New Year season, young girls in bright kimono batting a feathered shuttlecock back and forth was a common sight. The battledores used for playing the game were, and are, simple flat boards less than 50 cm long. Each had drawings painted on the wood or the silk facing. More elaborate battledores were also used, but they were often too heavy for play and used merely for decorative purposes. Most had designs of Kabuki actors. The pictures (*oshie*) were made by pasting together padded silk and brocade. A theory goes that the striking of shuttlecocks was symbolic of swatting mosquitoes, and the game originally was intended as a charm against insect bites. A more likely explanation is that the game was of Chinese origin. Some 2,000 years ago, a ritual one-player game was played in China with a ceremonial, befeathered 'bird' (a rounded piece of cork or similar material with feathers stuck into it). The goal of the game was to keep the 'bird' in the air as long as possible. The number of times it went up indicated the number of years the player would live. With time, this game of fortune-telling – eminently suitable for a New Year celebration – changed into the more familiar two-player game we know as shuttlecock.

*Fukuwarai* was a game in which a blindfolded player tried to place pieces of paper in the shape of eyebrows, eyes, nose, and mouth in what he or she

6 Oliphant means palanquins (*norimono*). Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, '58, '59*. 2 vols. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859. Reprinted in 1970 by Oxford University Press, London.

7 Oliphant, *Narrative 2*, pp.217–18.

Fig. 6. Girl playing *hanetsuki*.  
A decorated battledore  
(*hagoita*) and a shuttlecock  
(*hane*) made of a soapberry  
seed and attached bird  
feathers.



thought was the correct position within the outline of an *otafuku* – a homely woman’s face with round cheeks and a flat nose. As the face parts were often misplaced and attached to the wrong place, the game was enjoyed by any age group. There was no winner in this game, as it was played purely for enjoyment. Yet another popular New Year game was *uta karuta* (‘poem cards’), a card game played with two decks. It involved the matching of cards of one deck to another. Each deck came with 100 cards, each with part of a 31-syllable poem (*waka*) by a famous poet of the distant past. The poems were usually from the famous thirteenth-century anthology known as *Hyakunin isshu* (‘Single Poems by a Hundred Poets’).

Kite flying (*takoage*) was introduced to Japan from China during the eighth century. Kites, however, did not become popular among the general population until the Edo period. The prime kite flying season was around the New Year. Flying kites was in fact something of a fashionable pastime for adults rather than children. Kites came in a variety of shapes and sizes. Eventually, this practice spread also to other parts of Japan. In one game, the aim was to cut the string of a rival’s kite. Early European observers remarked on the oddness of this custom, as they saw men holding high official

positions and of advanced years busy themselves in this rather strenuous game. The British horticulturist Robert Fortune remarked in 1860: 'The kites were generally of a diamond shape, and were painted in gay colours of red, white, and blue. In every street, on the house-tops, on the hill-sides, and in the fields, there were numbers of both sexes and of all ages thus amusing themselves, and all seemed gay, contented, and happy.'<sup>8</sup>

Other popular games included *sugoroku* (a kind of backgammon introduced from China), *shôgi* (chess in the Chinese style), and *Igo* (an originally Chinese game also known as *Go*). Formerly, many games that included the use of painted shells had been popular and some undoubtedly remained. Being akin to card games, these or similar ones were in the Edo period frequently played with paper cards instead of old-fashioned painted shells.

If there was snow, children made snowmen, but this was not a special New Year activity. It was nevertheless enjoyable, and Edo only seldom had snow. Many other types of toys were used throughout the year. One popular toy was the *dendendaiko*, consisting of a small drum, usually made of paper, attached to a handle, and with bells hanging from strings on both sides. When shaking the handle, the bells struck the surface of the drum, which caused a sound like 'den-den,' hence its name. This toy was particularly popular in the early Edo period.

A very old game was *menko*. The players had game pieces (*menko*) made of circular or square pieces of clay, board, lead, or (more recently) paper. One player's *menko* was placed on the ground, and the other player threw his own *menko* at it in an attempt to turn it over. In Edo, the game pieces were decorated with pictures of sumô champions.<sup>9</sup> Edo children enjoyed many other paper toys, too. Indeed, *origami* (paper folding) was popular not only as an art, but also as a game for children. Children also made their own toys of other materials. One popular game was to shape bamboo leaves into small boats (*sasabune*) and then set them adrift on a small stream. Although there were a number of ways to make these boats, most common was to fold both ends of a bamboo leaf inwardly, and then to cut the folded ends into three parts. The two sides were then fastened together, while the third, or middle, part was left sticking out. The strong and wide *kumasasa* bamboo was considered ideal for this purpose. Sails were sometimes added, made out of cherry blossoms. Other children put tiny flowers into their boats to represent people.

Another interesting possibility was to improvise music by cutting a leaf reed (*kusabue*), holding it against the tongue with the index and middle fingers, and then blowing hard through it. As everywhere, children always found means to enjoy themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Fortune, *Yedo and Peking: A Narrative of a Journey to the Capitals of Japan and China* (London: John Murray, 1863), pp.171–2.

<sup>9</sup> The game is still being played in Japan, but *menko* featuring comic book characters sell better.





Fig. C1. Cherry blossom viewing at Asukayama park, 1785.  
(Torii Kiyonaga, 1752–1815)

## Religion and Fortune-Telling

### Religion in Japan

The native Japanese religion, Shintô ('the way of the gods'), was in the Edo period much influenced by, one may say intermixed with, Buddhism. As Shintô derived from a mixture of animistic cults, some of considerable age, and shamanistic beliefs, derived from northern and ultimately central Asia, the religion was local in character and not much organised. Buddhism, to the contrary, had entered Japan from China by way of Korea around 1,000 years before the Edo period. It had brought not only an organised and quite introspective way of worship but also the trappings of Chinese civilisation and culture.

Surprisingly, the two religions mixed quite well. Although the two priesthoods and the centres of worship, Shintô shrines and Buddhist temples, in most cases retained their independence, the gods were incorporated into each other's religion and numerous religious sites soon had both Shintô and Buddhist places of worships, often in direct vicinity. Each devotee, upon visiting a shrine or temple, was expected to give a small sum in exchange for the privilege of praying. By the end of the Edo period, the poor were in most cases expected to contribute only a few copper *mon*. The wealthy gave substantially more. Eventually, Shintô gained an almost complete monopoly on weddings, while Buddhism gained a similar monopoly on funerals. This suited both religions, as Shintô remained a religion essentially concerned with fertility and the production of food or wealth, while Buddhism was more metaphysical and oriented towards the afterlife.

In the Edo period, however, many prominent members of the samurai class felt that neither Shintô nor Buddhism provided sufficient rules of conduct within the increasingly organised and strict society enforced by the Tokugawa shogunate. Such rules of conduct were found in Confucianism, a philosophy with religious overtones also derived from China at an early date. Strictly speaking, the Confucianism espoused by the ruling elite was Neo-Confucianism (*Shushi gaku*), developed in China by the Sung dynasty philosopher Chu Hsi (1130–1200; in Japan known as Shushi) and his followers, and then spread in China, Korea, and to Japan within a couple of hundred years. The distinction between Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism is small and can easily be ignored in this context. Confucianism provided a number of principles, the chief one being a system of loyalties, which was now being imposed on the general population. Although Confucianist ideas had been around in Japan for as long as the rest of the imported Chinese culture, and the country accordingly was fertile soil for these ideas, the strict implementation of them introduced by the shogunate elite was new. The rules were therefore often seen as oppressive, even though the basic tenets were agreed with. These, simply speaking, were that one's lord came before one's family, and one's parents came before one's spouse and children. This was expressed in the Five Human Relations and their attendant obligations (between father and son; ruler and subject; husband and wife; older and younger brother; and between friends). Authority was never to be questioned



and loyalty to one's lord was of supreme importance. Commoners were to remain sober and frugal, and all kinds of extravagances were to be avoided.

The shogunate soon saw fit to introduce – and enforce – requirements of sobriety and frugality in dress. Clothes patterns and materials were strongly regulated, so that law-abiding commoners did not need to decide for themselves how to dress. Confucianism was, unlike in China, regarded as a rules system rather than a religious creed. It never gained, or even strived for, general acceptance as a religion.

Confucianist logic notwithstanding, religious and superstitious beliefs reigned supreme in Edo and elsewhere in old Japan. Charms, amulets, and talismans (*ofuda*) were in widespread use. To avoid any disaster, the Edokko put talismans from temples and shrines on his household Shintô altar or at the entrance to his house. Amulets came in many kinds and had different purposes, for instance to avoid swellings or rashes, to avoid bad luck, to avoid catching a cold, to avoid thieves and evil, and to avoid general disasters. There was a counteracting amulet for every possible accident. Another option was to indicate one's wish to the gods by buying a votive plaque, a thin wooden board commonly depicting a horse and accordingly known as *ema* ('picture horse'). The horse was regarded as an auspicious symbol. Such votive plaques were in use since at least 736, but the practice of attaching religious beliefs to small horse statues went back hundreds of years before this date. During the Edo period, the horse pictures remained popular but received some competition from other motifs, more appropriate to the particular wish of the buyer, or the shrine or temple where he acquired his votive plaque. By the end of the Edo period, a depiction of a pomegranate and peach symbolised a wish for offspring; a catfish was believed to treat skin diseases, while an octopus cured warts.

### Shintô Shrines

Shintô includes a large variety of gods and deities (*kami*, meaning simply 'superior' or 'above'). Although these include the great gods and goddesses who created the world, masters of the sky, earth, and underworld, the lesser deities were, and are, usually of more importance to most Japanese. Among important lesser deities were the guardian deities of individual families, deities who ensured prosperity of farmers and traders, deities assisting craftsmen with their crafts, guardians of the merchants' associations, spirits living in the household looking after the kitchen and the latrine, and – in the country – a large number of spirits inhabiting mountains, trees, and stones. The vast multitude of deities can be classified into three general categories: natural deities that dwell in and rule over natural objects and phenomena; human deities or deifications of heroes and great personages; and conceptual deities that reign over abstract forces such as growth and reproductive power.

A Shintô shrine is, as the name implies, a sacred area which forms the habitat of the deity. It is marked by a cord or rope made by twisting together strands of rice straw (*shimenawa*). Larger shrines had resident priests to perform the sacred duties. Smaller shrines, such as a shrine in a village or town neighbourhood, had only a part-time priest to perform any functions required by the worshippers. Approach to the innermost part of

the sanctuary was limited to priests and, of course, the divine Imperial family whose members performed ritual duties in a few major shrines. Ordinary mortals could approach until certain limits, but only after purification which included hand-washing and mouth-rinsing, for which purpose there is outside each Shintô shrine a trough of clean water. After purification, the worshipper first bowed before the sanctuary, then clapped hands to attract the god's attention, and finally prayed. He was also expected to make a suitable contribution to the shrine funds. The custom to clap one's hands (*kashiwade*) gave rise to the merchant custom known as *tejime* or *teuchi*. This was performed at the end of striking a deal, as this caused for celebration.<sup>10</sup>

The duty of the Shintô priest was, as in any other religion, to act as intermediary between his people and the deities. He received offerings to the deity and recited prayers. Amulets and protective inscriptions were frequently given in return for offerings. In large shrines pilgrims formed a major part of the business. Worshipers who desired special prayers had to be ritually purified in addition to the customary hand-washing and mouth-rinsing. The priest then typically uttered a prayer while moving an ornamental rod with attached leaves or paper streamers over the worshipper's head. At times, major shrines gave dramatic representations of the myths. On a more worldly level, the priests also had to manage the estate of the shrine. Most shrines were concerned only with individual worshippers, so they generally remained small. Most of the more than 1,000 shrines in Edo enshrined the *ujigami* ('clan god') of the neighbourhood in which the shrine was located. In ancient times, these shrines – usually located in other places – had been centres for worshipping ancestor deities (*oyagami*).

In Edo, it was quite common to have a miniature shrine dedicated to Inari, the god of harvest and business prosperity, located near the neighbourhood well and latrines. Many landlords dedicated such Inari shrines at a corner of their lands, to ensure their own fortune. It became customary for landlords to invite all their tenants on *hatsuuma*, the 'First Day of the Horse', that is, the seventh day, of the Second Month, to give them a big feast. This date was chosen as being the annual festival day of Inari. It was said that 'landlords should be as good as parents to their tenants, and the tenants should be as good as children to their landlords.' Although this tenet was imposed by the Confucian ideology of the shogunate, it also reflected the customary traditions of Japan.

Every kitchen had a paper talisman of the god of the kitchen, called Kôjin, pasted on the wall. One prayed to this god to ensure the protection of the kitchen, and especially the protection against accidental fire. The god was believed to watch over the kitchen from behind the oven. This worship was similar to the Chinese worship of a kitchen god, but the similarity may or may not have been coincidental. A god of the hearth was a common ingredient in ancient societies.

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10 In modern Japan, the custom still exists among traders at the end of celebrations of various kinds. Both or all parties clap their hands a total of 10 times, in a 3-3-3-1 rhythm. This rhythm is known as *ipponjime*, and three repeats of it is called *sanbonjime*.

In ancient Japan, women had enjoyed far more equality than they did in the Edo period. At that time there had also been a female priesthood. A priestess could establish contact between the world of the living and the world of the dead by entering a trance. The true spirit medium (*ichiko*) was invariably a woman, of from 15 or 16 to some 50 years of age. Her job was to give tidings of the dead or of those who had gone away on long journeys. She plyed her trade by walking about the streets, carrying on her back a divining box about 30 cm square. A medium did not have any fixed place of worship, so it was most common to perform the ceremony in the home of the customer needing her services. Once part of a shamanistic belief spread over northern Eurasia, such women nowadays only remain in large numbers in Korea. Although female spirit mediums still remain in Japan, by the time of the Edo period they had already lost much of their former standing. The ceremony of divination was not complicated. A bowl of water was placed on a tray, and the customer, having written on a long slip of paper the name of the person whom he or she wished to contact, rolled the paper into a spill, which he dipped into the water, and thrice sprinkled the medium. She then rested her elbows upon her divining box, and, leaning her head upon her hand, muttered prayers and incantations, until she had successfully summoned the soul of the dead or absent person. She then entered a trance in which this soul took possession of her to answer questions through her mouth. As was the case of mediums everywhere, the somewhat vague prophesies she uttered were held in high esteem. A few shrine maidens were customarily employed by larger shrines, but they generally only took part in ritual shrine dances or, nowadays, perform clerical duties. By the Edo period, shrine maidens had lost most of their religious functions.

A Shintô priest usually married and raised a family. His son was expected to succeed him as the priest of the shrine. As his religion since ancient times in essence was a fertility cult, the priest did not have to practice any austerities. Moreover, a small shrine and its accompanying land was in all practical terms the private property of the priest's family. The only man who exercised any real control over most priests was the shogunate's Commissioner for Temples and Shrines. His influence, however, was naturally mainly felt in the large shrines. The small, rural shrines remained more or less unaffected by the policies of the shogunate.

The Shintô gods were incorporated in the Buddhist pantheon during the Edo period. However, the distinction between the two priesthoods remained clear. The great shrine of Ise, the ancestral shrine of the Imperial family, also successfully resisted Buddhism.

### Buddhist Temples

Buddhism, imported together with other trappings of civilisation from China in the sixth century, accordingly played quite a different role than Shintô. In formal Buddhism, it matters less what the general population believes, as long as they support the monks – the priesthood – who constitute the true believers. Besides, Buddhism was soon split into a number of different sects that could not agree on even basic tenets of the faith. Nevertheless, it was generally agreed that Buddhism taught that a man might achieve Buddhahood, the

ultimate goal of existence, only through his own efforts, through devotion and/or rituals. Most Buddhist sects appeared to the layman as deeply rooted in arcane lore and intricate ritual. If not understood, the ceremonies at least awed the layman. The Zen sect, unlike the others, concentrated on search for enlightenment through meditation, a goal perhaps no less mysterious but because of the sect's emphasis upon discipline and intuition the sect *par préférence* of the warrior class.

Eventually, Buddhist sects appeared that were more adapted to the needs of the common people. First came the various 'Pure Land' (Jôdo) sects, which taught that salvation depended on Amida (Amitabha in Sanskrit), a Buddha-like being who would grant eternal life in his Western paradise to anyone who believed in – and recited – a certain incantation. Which was the correct incantation? That usually depended on which sect one chose to believe in. Then came the Nichiren sect, developed by the fiery priest Nichiren into an equally fiery and intolerant cult. This sect, too, drew large crowds of believers. It especially attracted militants, whether of the lower or upper classes. Incidentally, it was also the first Japanese sect to preach hostility to foreigners. Buddhism had by then grown from a minor but important discipline of ancient lore into a truly popular religion. In the Edo period, Buddhism continued to grow, encouraged by the shogunate for political reasons. The reason was the Christian missionary work in the decades before Tokugawa Ieyasu assumed power.

Although Christianity had proved quite popular among the populace, the shogunate soon outlawed the new religion as part of the effort to close the country to foreign influences. Instead, Buddhism was promoted. Each and every commoner family had to register as parishioners of an acknowledged Buddhist temple. When first ordered in the territory under shogunate jurisdiction in 1638, this was merely a device to prevent any retention of Christian faith. The practice soon grew into a means to maintain control by keeping detailed registers on the population. In 1665, all domains were ordered to comply with the population registration policy, and from 1671 the shogunate demanded annual returns. Each year, every village had to submit a report of all its inhabitants, including women and servants, with particulars on their religious affiliations, and a declaration that every person had been properly examined and found not to be Christian. A test of trampling on the Christian cross (*fumie*) was sometimes used, at first to ensure that no hidden Christians remained, but later performed more as a traditional ceremony. The priest of the temple and the officials of the village had to sign the return. Particulars of birth, death, marriage, travel, occupation, and so forth were duly noted in the register of parish residents. Members of the warrior class were also recorded, but in separate, less informative registers maintained by the clans.

The life of a Buddhist monk was more complicated than that of a Shintô priest. The priesthood was highly organised, and divided into a number of grades. Training in the major temples was a prerequisite to advancement. Furthermore, most Buddhist sects practiced celibacy, although certain sects, notably some of the 'Pure Land' sects, allowed marriage. Most sects also insisted on a strict vegetarian diet. Alcoholic drinks, such as sake, and even

strong-smelling herbs were to be avoided. The priest had many duties, and could not spend all his time in meditation or pondering the great questions of life. His local temple would usually be a dependency of the major temple in which he had received his training, with all that this implied in imposing conformity and the delegation of tasks. Moreover, his temple would have property, which had to be administered. Priests sometimes delivered sermons. At times, an ancient form of masked dance drama (*gigaku*) was performed (although this tradition eventually died out during the Edo period). A Buddhist priest was often summoned to family consultations, especially in wealthy families. The great lords employed a number of Buddhist priests, to take care of religious observances but also to act as, for instance, scribes and teachers of arts such as calligraphy and the tea ceremony. Priests were called out to exorcise ghosts and spirits, a task performed by chanting and the rubbing of the rosary between one's hands, so that the beads rattled against each other.

The parishioners had to be taken care of, especially upon death. As the Buddhist faith always remained mainly preoccupied with death, it was natural that Buddhist rites were employed during a funeral. Although there was a Shintô form of burial, not involving cremation, the great majority of the population chose a Buddhist funeral. Although Buddhist funerals without cremation were, to some extent, carried out in distant areas, cremation was the most common part of the Buddhist funeral. During the Edo period, however, the growing influence of Confucian ideology led to a tendency to avoid cremation, with coffin burial being the new norm among the upper classes.

The funeral was an elaborate procedure. A priest would be called from the temple to chant one or more suitable passages from the holy Buddhist scriptures. These texts were Chinese translation of the originals, pronounced in Japanese, and accordingly utterly incomprehensible to the layman. The chant might be accompanied by the striking of a bell or wooden drum. Then the body was washed in warm water (*yukan*, 'water pouring') and clothed in a white cotton garment or the favourite clothes of the dead. Care was taken that the kimono was put on with the fold on the opposite side from the way the living fold their kimono. Then followed the *kosori* ('shaving'), when the hair of the dead was shaved off. Finally, the corpse was placed in its coffin, generally a barrel-shaped device in which the corpse was placed (*nyûkan*, 'placing in coffin') in a sitting position. The coffin was filled with incense powder. Money, known as *rokudôsen* ('six-way-coppers'), was also placed in the coffin. Money was needed on the way to the afterlife, to be given to the ferryman of the boat on the River Sanzu, which had to be crossed. Money was also necessary to appease the souls one must pass by on the way upward. The 'six-way-coppers' were so named because the road to the next world had six gates.

The lid was then closed and nailed, a stone being used instead of a hammer because of the fear that the spirit might cling to the hammer and later on cause injury. A charm was placed on the top of the lid. Relations and friends met together for a funerary vigil (*tsuya*) until the next morning, with lit candles, the burning of incense, and additional chants from the holy



scriptures. Close relatives were from now on in mourning. They did not arrange or shave their hair, and they were forbidden certain foods. Friends and relations bore a heavy burden for the funeral. One of them stationed himself for the funeral ceremony at the door, in his dress of ceremony, to receive the formal visits of condolence paid by friends and acquaintances of the deceased.

On the next day, usually in the afternoon but both day and time was chosen to be auspicious, the coffin was carried on a bier to the cremation-ground or burial-place, preceded by chanting priests if the estate of the deceased could afford it and followed by the relatives of the deceased. For the upper classes, such a procession was headed by a number of torch-bearers, followed by a large company of priests carrying incense, sacred books, and other implements for the situation. Then came a crowd of servants, carrying bamboo poles to which were attached lanterns, umbrellas, and strips of white paper inscribed with sacred sentences. The coffin was borne upon a bier, covered with a white paper cover having a dome-fashioned roof, over which a garland was suspended from a bamboo carried by a servant. The bier rested on the shoulders of six or eight carriers. Immediately behind the coffin followed the friends and acquaintances of the deceased, in their dress of ceremony, and the male members of the family, attired in mourning garments of pure white, the colour of mourning. The bearers and the household servants of the deceased also wore white, for the same reason, as they were considered part of the family. Finally followed the female relatives and their friends, attended by the female servants. The relatives wore white. In upper-class families, the female mourners rode in palanquins. In lower-ranking families, they walked behind the men. An ordinary farmer could seldom afford a funeral pyre, so a part of his land was typically set aside as a family burial place.

During the funeral service, two persons sat in a side chamber of the temple, writing down the names of all friends and acquaintances who attended the funeral.<sup>11</sup> If the full course was followed, the ashes were collected after the cremation, and the charred bones of the dead person collected and put in a mortuary urn or reliquary (*kotsutsubo*) in the ceremony known as 'bone-picking' (*kotsuage* or *kotsuhiro*). Every piece of charred bone seems to have been picked up by two persons each holding it with a pair of chopsticks. The urn was then placed under a memorial stone in a cemetery attached to the temple. The dead person also received a new, posthumous name (*kaimyô*). On the forty-ninth day after death, a lacquered tablet (*ihai*) on which this name was written was placed upright on the house's Buddhist altar (*butsudan*). Another, similar tablet might be placed in the temple to which the family belonged. The house of the deceased was also purified, but this was in accordance with Shintô rather than Buddhist beliefs. In ancient times, the building would have been burned, but that expensive custom died out long before the Edo period.

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11 This also takes place in modern Japan, but nowadays the attending friends write their own names.

The rituals were not concluded that easily, however. Buddhist faith required memorial services (*hōji*), involving prayers and yet more chanting from the scriptures, to be held at fixed periods after the death had occurred. The service of the first day has already been described, and memorial services were also held on the third day, that is, the day after the funeral. Every seventh day after the day of death until the seventh of these, that is, the forty-ninth day, was a day of mourning and special prayers were offered for the dead. Special rice cakes, *ohagi*, were offered, in some places as many in number as days had elapsed since the funeral. It was believed that on the days of mourning and special prayers, and especially on the seventh, thirty-fifth, and forty-ninth days, detailed consideration of the merits or lack thereof of the deceased took place in the Nether World. Prayers and incense rising from the world of the living could favourably influence the judgement and thus the kind of life the dead would hereafter enjoy (or suffer). Another, but related, explanation was that the spirit of the dead was expected to wander in the darkness between this world and the next for 49 days, and every seven days it made an advance forward, in which it was materially helped by the prayers from the world of the living.

On the fiftieth day, the open mourning was over. The male members of the family, who had not shaved their heads and beards during the period of mourning, now did so and resumed their ordinary place in society. They were again permitted to eat ordinary foods. Their first duty was to pay visits of thanks to all those who had been present at the funeral. Although the period of open mourning was indeed over, the formalities were not. The hundredth day was another memorial day that demanded commemoration and religious rites. Yet more ceremonies were observed on the anniversary of the death. Again, certain anniversaries were more important than others. These were the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-third, twenty-seventh, thirty-third, thirty-seventh, and the fiftieth, and after the hundredth year (in the Japanese reckoning of years, which counts the year of death as the first year). All these commemorations required a visit to the temple, chanting from the scriptures, burning of incense, and lighting of candles. Special memorial services were (and are) also held in the seven-day period known as *higan*, centred on the spring and autumn equinoxes in March and September. A temple thus ensured itself of a steady and plentiful source of income from local, pious families. A proverb states: 'Winter cold and summer heat end at *higan*.' At these times, people visited the graves of their ancestors to pray for the souls of the dead and sprinkle water on the gravestones. *Ohagi* rice cakes were again put as offering on Buddhist altars. The time around the equinoxes were chosen as at that time the sun set exactly in the west, where the Buddhist paradise was thought to be located. The custom may have been much older, however, originating in the ancient sun-worship cult of Japan.

Ancestor reverence or worship of the kind described above in the Edo period remained a pursuit of the upper classes only, and of those townsmen who were sufficiently wealthy to wish to emulate their betters. Edo period commoners did not generally revere their ancestors, except their parents. And this was obviously regarded as a Confucian duty, not a religious



Fig. 7. A Buddhist priest wearing the *kesa*.

remembrance, a fact made clear from a number of official edicts that exhorted the populace to revere one's parents. Nowhere is the word ancestor, or even grandparent, mentioned in these edicts.

Less profitable to the temple, but of possibly more importance to the relatives of the dead, was the period of mourning. The length of this period varied from region to region and according to how close the mourner and the deceased had been, from 50 days for a parent, 30 days for a husband, 20 for a wife, to three for a nephew or niece. In older times, the period of mourning could have lasted for an entire year, but in the busy Edo period, this was dispensed with. However, the belief that mourning had to be strictly observed during the first 49 days remained, as it was believed that the soul of the departed did not leave the house it had lived in until at the end of that time. In any case, the first seven days were most seriously observed.

The period of mourning had sometimes great significance, as mourning required the mourner to hide himself from the world. The reason, interestingly enough, had more to do with Shintō than with Buddhism; the mourner had to avoid contaminating others with the taint of death. In particular, the mourner had to avoid Shintō shrines, which would be defiled if he entered. For the same reason, the main entrance to the family home must be barred and the mourner's head had to be kept covered, if only with paper, to avoid exposing the sun to the contamination of death. Weddings, celebrations, division of property, and

similar events that required auspicious settings were out of the question. The mourner did neither shave nor cut his hair during the period of mourning, nor did he partake of sake, fish, shellfish, or meat. Even music was forbidden. Members of certain social classes, in particular those of the Imperial court but also respectable samurai, had to wear special mourning dress. These had to be worn for much longer than the actual period of mourning, in the case of the death of a parent for as long as 13 months.

Most Buddhist monks began their career already as young boys, entering holy orders as novice monks. Others, especially older people (including several retired emperors), entered religion as a means of retreat from the world. Women could become nuns, but they did not perform the duties of monks. Buddhist priests were not a part of the class system. They were supervised by the authorities, however, and punishments were available for any miscreants. Punishment varied, but was in a category by itself, more similar to the chastisements of the samurai class than those of the commoners. Banishment from one's temple or confinement to it were common punishments.

Buddhist novice monks were often seen near the large temples, as they each morning had to go out for alms with their begging bowls. This was an old Buddhist tradition. More important, the parishioners were morally and financially required to maintain the temple to which they belonged. A novice monk typically wore a white robe held in place by a cord girdle, a black jacket,

and a straw hat. On his otherwise bare feet, he would usually wear straw sandals or wooden *geta*. An established member of the Buddhist clergy wore the basic attire of the novice monk, but above this he added a *kesa*, a mantle that hung over the left shoulder and round the waist to the right (Fig. 7), reminiscent of the robes worn by Chinese Buddhist priests when the religion first reached Japan. Otherwise his clothing varied according to his rank and sect. Each Buddhist monk shaved his head to symbolise his act of entering holy orders. Each also carried a rosary, the 108 beads of which were counted, one after the other, for each prayer and for the each of the 108 earthly desires or passions (*bonnô*).

Due to the celibacy supposed to be upheld by most Buddhist monks, they were usually the targets of bad rumours, something which the morally more relaxed Shintô priests escaped. Stories circulated about homosexual relationships with young novice monks, and for that matter, with the many boy prostitutes who then also were part of Japanese daily life. Other rumours told of Buddhist priests who secretly kept women in the temple. There was undoubtedly some truth in these stories, although it is today hard to judge exactly how common such behaviour was. Buddhist monks indulged in more harmless forms of entertainment, too. The theatre was a source of much enjoyment for more than one monk.

Here should also be mentioned the *komusô* ('priests of nothingness'), mendicant members of the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism who were all masterless men of the warrior class. The *komusô* (originally *komosô*) organisation was officially sanctioned during the Enpô period (1673–81) to control the large numbers of masterless samurai that roamed Japan. Although a *komusô* was affiliated to one of several temples, the organisation had less to do with religion than to provide its members with an acceptable occupation. The *komusô* were allowed to use ferries without paying any fee. They even did not need to pay admission to the theatres. The *komusô* was never obliged to remove his basket-like hat (*tengai*). However, they were not allowed to ride horses or palanquins, nor form any larger group than two *komusô*, nor could they stay in any one location for more than a day. Unlike other monks, they did not perform funerals or memorial services or recite sutras. Each carried his 'three seals' (*san'in*): *honsoku* (the *komusô*'s licence), *kaiin* (personal identification), and *tsûin* (travel permit). Each also carried his 'three tools': the *komusô*'s basket-like hat, his priestly dress, and most importantly, the *shakuhachi* flute, a musical instrument exclusively used by the *komusô*. Because of their comparatively high level of personal freedom, commoners and criminals frequently assumed the garb of *komusô*.

### Fortune-Tellers

Many shrines and temples included fortune-telling as part of their services. Fortune-telling was practiced by drawing lots, a method imported from China in ancient times. The customer was handed a container full of numbered bamboo sticks. The container was provided with a small hole, so by shaking it hard, one of the bamboo sticks eventually emerged from the container. This stick was then exchanged for a paper fortune (*omikuji*). The most favourable *omikuji* were, and are, known as *daikichi* ('great happiness'),

followed in descending order by *kichi* (happiness), *shôkichi* (moderate happiness), and *kyô* ('bad luck'). There was also a short text, which generally told such things that 'you shall pass an examination; recover from illness, make much money; have an offer of marriage; settle all your troubles', and other similar matters. The bad luck *omikuji* were fewer in number than the good luck *omikuji*.

All *omikuji* fortunes were written in a very flowery style, usually with passages quoted from the *Ekikyô*, the ancient Chinese Book of Changes (Chou I, more commonly known as I Ching) or some obscure poem. The message thus bordered on the incomprehensible, a fact which no doubt assisted in interpreting the message. If the fortune indicated bad luck, the paper was usually tied to a tree within the grounds of the shrine or temple in the hope that the ill luck would not come true. Likewise, a good fortune was often tied in the same way, with a prayer that it would come true.

Temple and shrine fortune-telling was not the only method of ascertaining one's future. The *onmyôji* (or *on'yôshi*) were skilled in *onmyôdô*, the Chinese science of *yin* and *yang*. Yin was the negative principle of life, while yang was the positive one. They, too, relied on the *Ekikyô*, the Book of Changes. Such specialists were concerned with the calendar, the compass directions, the stars, and with physiognomy. They were consulted about important and serious questions such as the choice of marriage partners, the date of a wedding, the commencement of the building of a new house, the beginning of a business venture, or the start of a journey. For buildings, they also gave advice about in which direction it should face, the disposition of the rooms, and other details.

Land divination (*tsuchi uranai*) was an important science in Japan, just as in China. The north-east, for instance, a direction known as 'demon's gate' (*kimon*), was regarded as an unlucky direction, as this was the direction by which demons enter and leave. It was, and is, considered unlucky to build a house with the entrance facing this way. It was also considered unlucky to sleep with the head towards the north (*kitamakura*, 'northern pillow'), as dead bodies were laid out in this direction. Widowers and widows, however, placed their pillows to the north as a sign of mourning. The explanation was that in ancient times, the highest-ranking member of any public ceremony had to sit with his back towards the north. Thus the eastern and nobler direction was to his left, which was the position of the second-highest-ranking member, while the inferior position, the west, was to his right. The most inferior position was with one's back to the south. Hence, the front of the residence of any man of means had to face to the south, so that any ceremony could be correctly performed in front of it.

Although the advice was generally based solely on the ancient astrological skills brought from China, some advice were more sound than the sceptical person might expect. For instance, a house facing the south will be warmer in winter because of the by then prevalent north wind and cooler in summer



Fig. 8. A fortune-teller (*ekisha*) with customers.



on account of the then prevailing south wind. Likewise, the main room was usually advised to be where most light fell into the room, usually to the east.<sup>12</sup>

In Edo period Japan, there were several tens of thousands of *onmyōji*. Many Shintō and Buddhist priests were also heavily involved in astrology. A related group of fortune-tellers was the *ekisha* (Fig. 8), who worked with a set of 50 divination sticks (*zeichiku*) of bamboo and six divination blocks (*sangi*) made of wood. With these tools, the fortune-teller showed various combinations of yin and yang from which a customer's fortune was told. In 1871, Algernon B. Mitford described the scene as follows:

With a treatise of physiognomy laid on a desk before them, they call out to this man that he has an ill-omened forehead, and to that man that the space between his nose and his lips is unlucky. Their tongues wag like flowing water until the passers-by are attracted to their stalls. If the seer finds a customer, he closes his eyes, and, lifting the divining-sticks reverently to his forehead, mutters incantations between his teeth. Then, suddenly parting the sticks in two bundles, he prophesies good or evil, according to the number in each.<sup>13</sup>

Professional palmists, many of whom were masterless samurai, practiced palmistry (*tesō uranai*). This science, too, was imported from China, as was

<sup>12</sup> The belief that a house must have most windows facing south and the second-largest number of windows facing east remains common in modern Japan.

<sup>13</sup> Algernon B. Mitford (Lord Redesdale), *Tales of Old Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1871; reprinted in 1966 by Charles E. Tuttle, Tōkyō), p.126.

physiognomy (*ninsô uranai*), or the study of the face and the body, practiced by professional physiognomists.

There were also itinerant diviners from the Kashima shrine (*Kashima no kotobure*) who roamed Japan announcing the oracle of the deity enshrined at Kashima, Hitachi Province (now Ibaraki Prefecture). Such a diviner wore a formal lacquered hat and carried a cane with attached mirror and sacred paper strips.

How much did the Edokko generally pay his fortune-teller? The novelist Jippensha Ikku mentioned in the mid 1800s that a fortune-teller cost around 16 copper *mon*. This was hardly more than the price of a single bowl of noodles. Fortune-telling was indeed so common that anyone could do it. Simple methods of fortune-telling, used by ordinary people, included how to predict the weather. This method was known as *geta uranai*. A *geta*, or wooden clog, was kicked into the air. If it fell upside down, rain would fall. If it fell on the side, the weather would be cloudy. Fair weather was only predicted if the *geta* fell with the top up. Related to this belief was the custom that appeared during the Edo period, if bad weather was forecast for the following day, to quickly fashion a doll (*teruteru bôzu*) from a square of usually white cloth or paper and some round padding placed in the centre, pushed up to make a round head, the neck secured with thread, and hang the resulting doll from the eaves. This was believed to work as a prayer for good weather the following day. If the wish came true, facial features might be drawn or painted on the doll.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, it may be mentioned that the practice of folk magic was alive and well in Edo. Old women assisted – for a fee – in preparing love potions, abortions, and curses. One popular way to curse or cast a spell upon someone was to pierce an effigy of seaweed with a needle, and then either stick the effigy to a tree or cast it into a well. The reasoning was presumably the same as in the Roman Empire, where it was believed that the magical efficacy of a curse was increased if the object of the curse was transfixed with a nail, then buried or dropped into a well, where it could take its place amid the powers of the Nether World.

Jealous women who wanted to be revenged upon faithless lovers also had another, somewhat similar recourse. The trees around a Shintô shrine are under the protection of the deity enshrined inside. A jealous woman would 'go to worship at the Hour of the Ox' (*ushi no toki mairi*), that is, between one and three o'clock in the morning. Such a woman donned a white robe and wore wooden *geta* as footwear. On her head, she put a coif shaped like a metal tripod, in which she thrust three lighted candles. Around her neck, she hung a mirror that covered her bosom and in her left hand she carried a small straw figure. This was the effigy of the lover who had abandoned her. She went to the shrine, where she, with a hammer and nails, fastened the effigy to one of the trees. There she prayed for the death of the faithless man, vowing that, if her petition was accepted, she would herself pull out the nails which now offended the deity by wounding the sacred tree. Night after night,

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14 Such dolls remain popular in modern Japan, where they are commonly made by children.

she went to the shrine, striking in two or more nails each time, in the belief that every nail would shorten the faithless man's life. The deity would surely, to protect his tree, cause the death of the man. Numerous other methods were undoubtedly also in common use.

### The Role Played by Festivals and Fairs

The true Edokko loved a good festival. Or, maybe, he simply loved the crowds that invariably turned out during a major festival (*matsuri*). Whatever the reason, there was a saying that the true Edokko would pawn his wife to raise funds for a festival. The majority of the festivals were derived from ancient rituals practiced by the nobles of the Imperial court. In time, these rituals had been assumed by the warrior class, too. Finally, either during the Edo period or slightly earlier, the festivals were taken up by the merchants, eagerly followed by all other townsmen. Edo also hosted a number of fairs (*ichi*). The word *ichi* is said to have been derived from a word for festival, and many fairs were held within the grounds of shrines and temples. For the average Edokko, there was probably little difference between a festival and a fair; both were good opportunities to indulge in plenty of good fun.

According to the lunar calendar, the days of the new moon, the first half-moon, the full moon, and the second half-moon (the first, seventh or eighth, fifteenth, and twenty-second or twenty-third days of each month, respectively) were treated as holy days. These days were known as *hare no hi*, as distinct from the other days of the month, which were known as *ke no hi*. Most festivals were held on the holy days. Many festivals began in the evening of one day and continued until the evening of the following. The reason was that a day was regarded as lasting from sunset to sunset. The festival day thus lasted only one day. For a list of the major festivals and fairs in Edo, see Table 1.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, most merchant households observed the first, fifteenth, and twenty-eighth days of each month as holidays. Many workers and servants were allowed time off on these days.

Edo was famous for three major shrine festivals. These were celebrated with tall, elaborately decorated festival wagons, or floats (*dashi*), that were towed and pushed by the parishioners through the streets. The spectacularly coloured festival wagons were elaborate affairs, usually decorated with carvings and often topped with one or more large dolls that in some cases could be telescoped upwards or perform other motions. Other festival wagons came with masked dancers, who performed upon them.

The probably greatest shrine festival was the Sannô Matsuri, held on the fifteenth day of the Sixth Month at the Hie Shrine (also known as Sannô-sama). The deity associated with the Hie Shrine, Sannô Gongen, was designated a tutelary deity of the Tokugawa family. The Hie Shrine therefore enjoyed the

<sup>15</sup> Modern-day Japan has switched to the solar calendar, which caused a disparity of approximately one month. Many traditional festivals are accordingly celebrated one month later, so that they actual time of the year will be the same as in the past. A festival held in the Seventh Month according to the lunar calendar will therefore often occur in August of the modern calendar.

**Table 1. Major Festivals and Fairs in Edo**

1st–3rd days, First Month	New Year ( <i>shōgatsu</i> )
7th day, First Month	<i>Nanakusa no kayu</i>
16th day, First Month	Servants' holiday ( <i>yabu iri</i> )
23rd day, First Month	Moon-viewing ( <i>tsukimi</i> )
4th day, Second Month	Solar New Year ( <i>setsubun</i> )
7th day, Second Month	Festival day of Inari
15th day, Second Month	Nirvana Festival ( <i>nehan e</i> )
3rd day, Third Month	Girls' Festival ( <i>momo no sekku</i> )
5th day, Third Month	Official servant replacement day
15th day, Third Month	Great Amida invocation ( <i>dai nenbutsu</i> )
18th day, Third Month	<i>Sanja Matsuri</i> (alternate years)
8th day, Fourth Month	Memorial of Buddha's birthday
17th day, Fourth Month	Memorial of Tokugawa Ieyasu's death
5th day, Fifth Month	Boys' Festival ( <i>tango no sekku</i> )
28th day, Fifth Month	Official opening of the Sumida River ( <i>kawa biraki</i> )
29th day, Fifth Month	Mount Fuji Festival
1st day, Sixth Month	Hydrangea Festival ( <i>ajisai tsuri</i> )
15th day, Sixth Month	<i>Sannō Matsuri</i> (alternate years)
7th day, Seventh Month	<i>Tanabata</i>
13–15th days, Seventh Month	<i>Bon</i>
16th day, Seventh Month	Servants' holiday ( <i>yabu iri</i> )
26th day, Seventh Month	'Moon-Waiting Night' ( <i>tsukimachi</i> )
1st day, Eighth Month	Memorial of Tokugawa Ieyasu's entry into Edo ( <i>hassaku</i> )
15th day, Eighth Month	Moon viewing ( <i>tsukimi</i> )
28th day, Eighth Month	Official closing of the Sumida River
5th day, Ninth Month	Traditional servant replacement day
9th day, Ninth Month	Chrysanthemum Festival ( <i>chōyō</i> or <i>kiku no sekku</i> )
13th day, Ninth Month	Moon-viewing ( <i>tsukimi</i> )
15th day, Ninth Month	<i>Kanda Matsuri</i> (alternate years)
10th day, Eleventh Month	Cock fair ( <i>tori no ichi</i> )
15th day, Eleventh Month	Seven-five-three Festival ( <i>shichigosan</i> )
14th day, Twelfth Month	Year-end fair ( <i>toshi no ichi</i> ), Fukagawa Hachiman Shrine
17th day, Twelfth Month	Year-end fair ( <i>toshi no ichi</i> ) or Battledore Fair ( <i>hagoita ichi</i> ), Asakusa
20th day, Twelfth Month	Year-end fair ( <i>toshi no ichi</i> ), Kanda Myōjin Shrine
22nd day, Twelfth Month	Year-end fair ( <i>toshi no ichi</i> ), Shiba
30th day, Twelfth Month	End-of-the-year festival ( <i>seibo</i> )

unlimited patronage of the shogunate. This festival was accordingly the most spectacular in Edo. It was also regarded as one of the three greatest Shintô festivals in all Japan, and the only of the three based in Edo. The other two were celebrated in Kyôto and Ôsaka, respectively.

Woodblock prints give vivid pictures of the festival. First in the procession went large numbers of children carrying lanterns, marked with the name of the festival (*Sannô gozairei*) and the name of their neighbourhood. Sixty decorated festival wagons, bearing figures of monkeys and a white elephant, also took part. So did many geisha and musicians, carried in special palanquins. They departed from the Hie Shrine, passed through the western and southern parts of the city and even continued through Edo Castle, entering through the Hanzômon Gate. The shôgun himself took part in the festival. The Sannô Matsuri was celebrated within Edo Castle already from 1615, and the festival was taken up by the townspeople outside the castle in 1634. Possibly the second biggest festival of Edo was the Kanda Matsuri, held on the fifteenth day of the Ninth Month at the Kanda Myôjin Shrine. Since 1681, this festival was held every other year, alternating with Sannô Matsuri. This festival procession, too, was permitted to enter the castle. The third major festival was the Sanja Matsuri, held every second year on the eighteenth day of the Third Month at the famous Asakusa Shrine, which was also known as Sanja-sama ('Shrine of the Three Venerable Ones') or, after its deity, Sanja Gongen. In the Edo period, the custom of *tekomaï* arose, the one occasion when geisha donned men's clothing and led the procession with a dance.

There were also many other, smaller shrine festivals in Edo, far too many to mention here. One of the larger one but not counted among the three major ones was the annual festival held since 1627 at the Hachiman shrine in Fukagawa. There was also a smaller Kanda Myôjin festival from the fifth day to the fourteenth day of the Sixth Month. Most other Edo festivals were somewhat more national in scope, being celebrated in most or all parts of Japan. This was the festival cycle in Edo:

The start of a new year (*shôgatsu*), that is, the first day of the First Month, was, and is, a special time for the entire family. The new year was a time of several days' holiday and much festivity. At the start of the celebration, the family wished each other a happy new year. But this was only the beginning. The first sunrise of the new year (*goraiko*) was since ancient times regarded as sacred. Many Japanese accordingly climbed high mountains to worship this sunrise.<sup>16</sup> This 'first sunrise' (*hatsuhinode*) is followed by the year's first visit to a shrine or temple (*hatsumôde*) to pray for prosperity and happiness. Preparations for the new year were undertaken to greet the deity of the incoming year (*toshigami*). A sacred straw rope (*shimenawa*) with white paper strips (*shide*) was hung over the entrance to sanctify the house. Two flat round, pounded rice cakes (*kagamimochi*) of different size, the small one on top of the larger one, were placed on a special altar, the *toshidana* ('year shelf'), or in the recessed display area known as *tokonoma*, together with sake and other offerings as a combined decoration and offering to the deity.

<sup>16</sup> In modern-day Japan, they line up in front of the lifts in the highest buildings.





Fig. C2. Celebrating New Year, from the series *Precious Children's Games of the Five Festivals*.  
(Torii Kiyonaga, 1752–1815)

Bitter mandarin oranges (*daidai*) were hung on top of the front gate or door. Pine tree sprigs (*kadomatsu*, 'gate pine'), made from pine branches, bamboo, and straw, were attached to the gate-posts of the entrance way. The pine tree is a symbol of longevity, and the pine tree sprigs always came in pairs, one on each side of the front gate or entrance door. In the early Edo period, the Jesuit Rodrigues mentioned that chopped kindling wood was placed at the foot of the pine tree sprigs. This wood was later burned (on the fifteenth day of the month), when townspeople celebrated by making bonfires in the streets. This custom appears not to have been observed later in the Edo period, however.

Gifts were exchanged between families in the form of food and other gifts or given by shrines and temples to their parishioners. The father and family head had to make the obligatory round of New Year calls to pay his respects, accompanied with suitable gifts, to his father, if still alive, his superiors, and any other patrons such as his wedding sponsor and all others to whom he owed obligation. Saikaku mentions that the usual gifts were swords (not real ones), kimono, sake, fish, and boxes of candles. His own dependants, naturally, had to pay a visit to him. Each visitor was entertained with rice cakes or rare delicacies and spiced sake. Children sometimes received *toshidama* ('gem of the year') money gifts, a practice which has become widespread in more recent years. The New Year celebration lasted for three days. These days were official holidays, and by tradition people did not work. Other days in the First Month, too, were noted and celebrated, and by some treated as part of the New Year festival. These days were the fifth, the seventh, the fifteenth, and the twentieth. Children and adults also celebrated by playing several traditional games (see 'Toys and Games', above), typical for the season.

The Edokko also feasted on the traditional New Year cuisine (*osechi ryôri*). This was special food cooked at home. There are many varieties, chief among them dried abalone (*noshi*), which was always served during celebrations. As the eating of fish or shellfish was prohibited during periods of mourning, dried abalone was reserved for times of celebrations. It therefore acquired a propitious meaning. Abalone was also a symbol of longevity, because of its shape. In Edo, the early European observers reported, this dried shellfish was indeed an indispensable dish at every banquet, even though no one was really expected to eat it. It was always served, however, and everybody at least made the gesture of trying it. Food was selected to symbolise the wish for good fortune, health, and happiness, usually through wordplay involving the name of the food. Food was also associated with various symbols. Boiled black soybeans, for instance, symbolised health. The herring roe – a myriad of tiny eggs – was a symbol of fertility. A special course made with small dried salted sardines known as *tsukudani* was a symbol of good harvests. Another possibility was *sekihan* ('red rice'), rice steamed with azuki beans.

The New Year dishes were packaged in a many-tiered lacquer box set known as *jûbako* ('stacked boxes'). The set consisted of a number of small lacquered wooden boxes, stacked in groups of two, three, or five, and used for storing, carrying, and also serving pre-cooked food at celebrations. The box set was not only used during New Year; it was also used during weddings, and as picnic box when on an excursion. Yet another type of special food

eaten to celebrate the new year was *zôni*, a soup made of pounded rice cakes (*mochi*), vegetables, and other ingredients. The custom of eating *zôni* presumably originated as early as the fifteenth century. *Mochi* was always thought to bring good luck, so *zôni* is accordingly the most auspicious of the different New Year courses. Spiced sake (*tosô*) was also drunk, in a prayer for happiness in the coming year. The custom was like so many others of Chinese origin. A triangular red cloth bag holding a mixture of seven or eight herbs was soaked in the well on the last day of the year. On the morning of the new year, the bag was steeped in sake. Each member of the household, beginning with the youngest, sipped the sake, facing towards the east. In this way, the young shared their vitality with the old, so that everybody and especially the latter would enjoy good health through the coming year.

The New Year celebration was not only about food, of course, even though eating was a major part of the Edokko's life. The first dream of the new year (*hatsûyume*) was an important event, as it predicted good or bad luck for the entire coming year. To ensure a lucky dream, the Edokko kept a painting or more commonly a cheap woodblock print of the Treasure Boat (*takarabune*) manned by the Seven Gods of Good Luck (*shichifukujin*) under his pillow. The luckiest first dream a person could have was one about Mount Fuji. The second luckiest was to dream about a flying hawk, the third was dreaming of eggplants. If the dream was a bad one, however, it was discarded together with the print by throwing it into a river.

The 'work beginning' (*gyôzome*) was also considered an important event. The first money received in one's business was often given to a temple or shrine as gratitude-offering, to buy the god's favour in the coming year.

According to a custom originally brought from China, the emperor was on the seventh day of the First Month presented with a special dish of rice gruel (*okayu*) mixed with the 'seven herbs' (*nanakusa*), the first seven herbs of spring. It was believed that eating this rice gruel (*nanakusa no kayu*) kept one in good health for the rest of the year. The custom accordingly spread throughout the country. Of the 'seven herbs', the most important in the Edo period was arguably the giant radish (*daikon*).

On the sixteenth day of the First Month, employed servants and workers enjoyed a holiday known as *yabu iri*. On this day, they were allowed to return to their hometowns for one to three days. A wife, too, was allowed to return to her hometown for a visit. The name of this holiday may be derived from the words 'entering the bamboo grove' which some take to mean the country. Other names for this kind of vacation were *yado ori* and *yado iri*.

A favourite winter pastime in Edo, but one which was more dependent on the weather than the calendar, was snow viewing (*yukimi*). This was an old, aristocratic fad which had spread to the common people. Whenever the weather so allowed, the Edokko customarily gathered at some likely excursion site to eat and drink (and possibly also cast a glance at the snow-covered landscape).

On the twenty-third day of the First Month, a moon-viewing festival (*tsukimi*) was held in Edo. It was believed that wishes were sure to be granted if one waited for the half-moon to rise on this night.

*Setsubun* was the solar new year and regarded as the last day of winter. It usually took place on or around the fourth day of the Second Month. The *Edokko* customarily threw roasted soybeans inside and outside his home, shouting the words '*Fuku wa uchi, oni wa soto!*' ('In with good luck, out with the demons!') to drive away evil spirits and disease (*oni yarai*). This custom was called *mame maki*. It was also common to have one member of the family wear a demon mask. He or she then became the target of the beans thrown by the rest of the family. Originally, only men threw soybeans, and it is still customary for men and boys to throw them. After throwing the beans, each family member is supposed to eat as many soybeans as his or her age, and then pray for a year full of happiness, good health, and fortune.

On the seventh day of the Second Month, the annual festival day of *Inari*, the rice deity, was held. This festival was celebrated with much noise, such as the playing of flutes and beating of drums, and therefore especially enjoyed by children. Long banners with inscriptions were erected, lamps and lanterns were hung, and houses were decorated with various dolls and figures. The people celebrated by dancing and merriment. The *Inari* festival has been described as the most bustling annual festival of Edo, and this was presumably true, judging from the vast number of *Inari* shrines in Edo. Landlords customarily invited their tenants to share the celebration. On this day, the Kite Fair (*tako-ichi*) was held at some major *Inari* shrines, including the one in *Ôji*, a northern suburb north of *Komagome*. The kites sold at this fair were said to prevent fire, as a kite cuts through the wind and therefore prevents it from fanning any fire.

On the fifteenth day of the Second Month, the Nirvana Festival (*nehan e*) took place. Paintings were displayed in various temples, showing Buddha's attainment of nirvana. The *Edokko* went to worship the paintings, as well as to buy nirvana prints, highly popular among the public.

At the time of the *higan*, the autumn and spring equinoxes, the head of the family went to the cemetery to pour water over the tomb of his dead parents and offer a prayer. This custom (*haka mairi*, 'cemetery visit') was old even in Edo times but has survived until today.

Employment and dismissal of domestic servants and workers could of course take place at any time, but especially in the early Edo period, two traditional 'servant replacement days' (*dekawaribi*) existed for this purpose. Usually only a breach of contract or serious misbehaviour led to the dismissal of a servant at other times. Servants who did not wish to wait until the end of the term had to leave on plea of illness (real or feigned) or family problems. The first servant replacement day was established by law in *Kyôto* in 1610, fixed as the second day of the Second Month. This replacement day was introduced to Edo in 1618. In 1653, the date was changed to the fifteenth day of the Second Month, and in 1659 to the twentieth day of the Second Month. From 1668, the servant replacement day was fixed as the fifth day of the Third Month. This final servant replacement day was from 1672 not only observed in the shogunate cities but in all villages as well. In practice, there existed at least from the *Genroku* period (1688–1704) also a second servant replacement date. Servants hired on six-month contracts (*hanki* or 'half-season' terms) could be hired or dismissed on the fifth day

of the Ninth Month. The two servant replacement dates remained in effect until the very end of the Edo period. The servant replacement days were not strictly adhered to, however. The Eleventh Month, for instance, was also a favourite time of employment, especially for terms shorter than six months. One possible explanation for the law about designated replacement days may have been that it differentiated job-seeking servants and workers, legitimately moving around, from vagrants and beggars.<sup>17</sup>

On the fifteenth day of the Third Month, there was a great Amida invocation (*dai nenbutsu*) on the site marking the death of the semi-fictional Umewaka-maru, a 12-year-old child who appears in the Nô play *Sumidagawa*. The invocation took place at the temple Mokuboji at Mukôjima.

In spring, the Edokko had a passion for cherry blossoms. Edokko of both sexes customarily crowded the conventional cherry blossom locations, such as Ueno Park, and armed with food, drink, and groundsheets attempted to stake out a claim under the blossoming cherry trees (Fig. 9). Why the hurry? The traditional answer is, to see the cherry blossoms (*hanami*). However, the revelry of drinking, singing, and sometimes dancing makes the casual observer wonder if the merrymakers really had time to see the cherry blossoms they had come for. Or maybe they had come for other kind of blossoms? The writer Saikaku gives a spirited description of the typical *hanami* celebration in the early Edo period:

The sea and fields were still, as the setting sun vied with the resplendent red garments of our ladies for favour in the eyes of all. In the company of ladies dressed in such brilliant colours, the wisteria and yellow rose went unnoticed by the throng of other picknickers who had come to see the flowers but now peered instead into our party's curtained enclosure and were charmed by the sight of pretty maids inside. Forgetting the hour for departure, forgetting everything, these picknickers opened up casks of wine and proclaimed drunkenness man's greatest delight ... the girls drank their full share of wine, and outside the litter-bearers helped themselves to large cups until they fell into a drunken sleep, snoring deeply and dreaming blissfully ... At this juncture the other people in the grove suddenly gathered round to watch a passing band of entertainers with a big drum and lion dancers ... The girls were fascinated by it and abandoned all their other amusements to crowd around, applaud, and cry for encore after encore, lest the entertainment stop too soon.<sup>18</sup>

17 This, at least, was the reasoning behind similar laws in contemporary Europe. In sixteenth-century Munich and Strasbourg, servants were only permitted to change master on two designated days, six months apart, while in Nuremberg there was only one such hiring day per year. In rural England, too, employment commonly began on fixed days well into the nineteenth century. Many contemporary Japanese companies still restrict their hiring of new employees to April, following the Edo law as a matter of habit.

18 Ihara Saikaku, *Five Women Who Loved Love*. Translated by W. Theodore de Bary (Tôkyô: Charles E. Tuttle, 1956), pp.56-7.

On the eighth day of the Fourth Month, a festival took place in which hydrangea tea was sprinkled on an image of the infant Buddha, in a celebration of his birthday. This was known as the 'Buddha ablutions' (*kanbutsu e*).

The anniversary of Tokugawa Ieyasu's death on the seventeenth day of the Fourth Month was naturally a day of ceremony sponsored by the shogunate. Rituals were held in various places, especially at the two Tōshōgū shrines at Ueno and Shiba.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Sumida River was ceremoniously opened (*kawa biraki*) every year on the twenty-eighth day of the Fifth Month. Between this day and the closing ceremony, on the twenty-eighth day of the Eighth Month, the river was accordingly 'open' for entertainment boats of various kinds. According to woodblock prints, the river was indeed crowded in these days. Not only were there pleasure boats known as 'roof-shape ships' (*yakatabune*) but also many traders in small 'luggage-carrying boats' (*nitaribune*), busy selling sake, dumplings, rice cakes, watermelons, and other necessities for enjoying the good life. The river surely had some fun for everyone.

On the last day of the Fifth Month and the first day of the Sixth Month, the Edokko went on a pilgrimage to Mount Fuji. He did not go the real mountain but to one of the several miniature models of Mount Fuji that had been raised in many Edo shrines. Climbing these model mountains was normally prohibited, but on these two days they were opened for the Edokko. Women too were allowed to climb, unlike at the real Mount Fuji where women were prohibited. This was an Edo festival that did not take place in, for instance, Kyōto and Ōsaka.

On the first day of the Sixth Month, the Edokko decorated his home with hydrangeas, as part of the Hydrangea Festival (*ajisai tsuri*). Another seasonal flower event was the 'morning glory fair' (*asagao ichi*), from the beginning of the nineteenth century held in summer (around July) at the Shingenji Temple at Iriya, between Ueno and Yoshiwara. Potted morning glories of various colours and sizes were sold to the Edokko from numerous stalls.

Twice a year, on the last day of the Sixth Month and the last day of the Twelfth Month, all debts had to be paid and all accounts settled. To be unable to do so was a major disgrace, especially to the merchant, for whom it amounted to personal bankruptcy.

The *Tanabata* festival was both a popular festival and an event supported by the shogunate. The festival was originally based on the Chinese legend of the Herdsman Star (Altair) and his wife, the Weaver-Maiden Star (Vega). In their delight together, the two lovers neglected work, so they were finally condemned to meet only once a year, on the seventh night of the Seventh Month. Only then can the herdsman cross the river in the sky, the Milky Way (*Ama no kawa*), to meet his beloved weaver-maiden. This date was accordingly celebrated as an important festival. The name *Tanabata* is written with the Chinese characters for 'seven' and 'evening', in reflection of the timing of the festival.

Originally, the *Tanabata* festival was celebrated to pray and absolve oneself of sins. First, on the night of the festival, the Edokko wrote down his or her prayer on a multicoloured paper streamer (*tanzaku*). This was hung on a



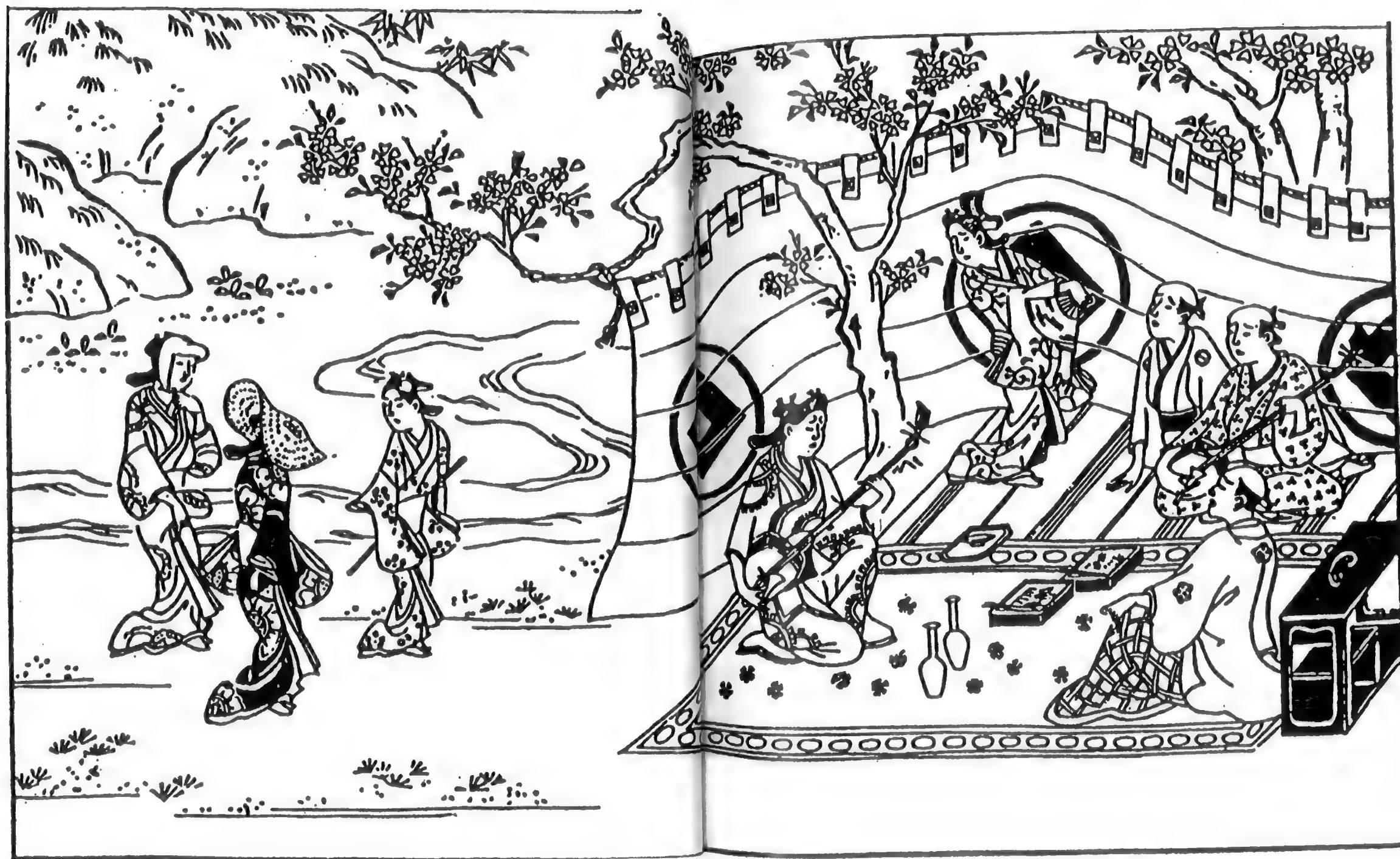


Fig. 9. Connoisseurs watching cherry blossoms, only slightly distracted by food, drinks, and music.

bamboo pole. Then, on the following morning, the paper streamer was set adrift on a river or in the sea, in the hope that the prayer would reach and be answered by the gods. According to popular belief, prayers made on this day were certain to be fulfilled within at most three years. Later the festival changed part of its character. Bamboo branches with the leaves still on and decorated with coloured paper streamers on which poems were written were then set up outside each upper-class house. Cards with poems about the two stars, papier-mâché models of notebooks, brushes and other writing equipment were also displayed outside one's house. The pupils wrote poems at school. In a sense, *Tanabata* had become a festival of literacy. The lower classes – presumably not very literate – instead celebrated by decorating their houses with gourds and persimmons on the branch.<sup>19</sup>

In old Edo, and also among the businessmen of modern Tôkyô, the gift-giving season (*chûgen*) was strictly respected. It was customary to pay visits and exchange gifts with friends and relatives (*doyô mimai*) at the hottest time of the summer, and particularly at the time of the *Bon* festival (see below). The gifts chosen for close friends were usually not very expensive. Saikaku mentions that 50 cheap gift fans cost only one monme of silver, or approximately 67 copper mon. The gift-giving custom originated in a Taoist festival (among the Chinese still celebrated for the 'Great Unity Heavenly Worthy Who Relieves Suffering' in the Festival of Hungry Ghosts), held on the fifteenth day of the Seventh Month. This festival was (both in China and Japan) eventually confused and combined with the originally Buddhist *Bon* festival. Gifts were only given from inferiors to superiors, and never in the opposite direction. However, politeness required that one depreciated oneself by giving a gift also to an equal, from whom one hoped to acquire a favour or good relation. Between friends, the value of the gift was immaterial; a dozen eggs might be a sufficient gift, provided it was placed in a beautiful box, tied with silk cord, and offered upon a handsome tray, with a knot of coloured paper, symbolic of good luck. Common gifts included rice, dried noodles, and sweets. An old custom was to attach a strip of dried abalone (*noshi*) wrapped in red and white paper to decorate the gift. This was considered auspicious.<sup>20</sup>

*Bon* or *urabon* (a Japanese translation of Sanskrit *ullambana*, the original meaning of which is 'terrible affliction') was originally an ancient Buddhist ceremony, held to thank the souls of one's ancestors for protection from harm through the first half of the year. It has been celebrated in Japan since the year 606. The festival begins on the evening of the thirteenth day of the Seventh Month, and lasts for three days. Small fires are lit to welcome the ancestral spirits back to earth. The spirits stay for three days, during which offerings are placed on a simple stand, and prayers are offered for past, present, and future existences. It is common to visit the graves of one's ancestors. On the evening of the fifteenth day of the same month, the *Bon* dance (*bon odori*) takes place.

19 In modern Japan, the tradition has in a manner returned to its roots, and children again write their wishes on colourful paper streamers.

20 The custom remains common today. Nowadays, however, the dried abalone has been replaced by a similar piece of neatly folded paper, the packet then being known as *noshibukuro*.

On the following day, small fires are again lit, but this time to escort the spirits back to heaven. In some places, the custom is to send the spirits down the river to the sea in strings of paper boats, each decked with a lantern to light its way out to sea. The memorial service function of the *Bon* festival was not all there was to it. More eye-catching and definitely more popular was the Bon dance, originally part of the entertainment of the spirits and performed outdoors by the whole neighbourhood. The participants, men and women together, most of them dressed in the light cotton kimono known as *yukata*, danced in a circle around the musicians, performing on drums, flutes, and *shamisen* from a temporary platform or tower (*yagura*) set up in an open space and lit by coloured lanterns. The dance was generally slow and graceful, suitable to the warm summer weather, although some parts of Japan had different customs.

On the sixteenth day of the Seventh Month, following the *Bon* festival, the employed city servants and workers again enjoyed the holiday known as *yabu iri*. Again they were allowed to return to their hometowns for one to three days. A wife, too, was allowed to return to her hometown for a visit.

Those days of the hottest period of summer which fell on the sign of the Ox (*ushi*) were known as the *doyô no ushi no hi*. On those days it was customary to eat food rich in nutrients to help the body recover from heat exhaustion. As it was believed that dark-coloured food, such as black carps, eels, catfish, dark shelled clams (*shijimi*), and eggplants, were unusually nutritious – the explanation goes that oxen (*ushi*) are usually dark brown or black – these were the most popular types of food. In Edo, the well-known naturalist, writer, and eccentric Hiraga Gennai (1728–80) was once asked by an eel restaurant owner for a catchy advertising slogan. He came up with ‘*ushi* days are *unagi* [eel] days’ This slogan firmly rooted itself among the impressionable Edokko, and since the early nineteenth century, eel has remained the standard fare all over Japan for the hot summer’s cuisine. Hiraga Gennai did not live to see the success of his slogan. In 1779, during a fit of madness, he killed one of his disciples with a sword. He died in prison the following year.

On the ‘moon-waiting night’ (*tsukimachi*) of the twenty-sixth day of the Seventh Month, many Edokko gathered in the high places of the city, frequently on top of Kudan Hill, or along the coasts, waiting for the moon to rise. Uncommonly good luck was said to ensue if the moon emerged in a triple image, then falling back into a single one. The vigil lasted almost until dawn. It was customary to light several candles and spend the evening in prayer until moonrise. It was, however, also common to hire a proxy to keep the vigil in one’s place. The writer Saikaku mentions that a beggar could be hired for this purpose for as little as 12 copper *mon*. This was a bargain for the man who desired good luck but did not see the need to spoil a good night’s sleep. The belief in the merits of the ‘moon-waiting night’ also led to a similar custom. On the third, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-third, and twenty-sixth of each month, it became customary to gather among friends to celebrate the moon by drinking sake.

Tokugawa Ieyasu had made his official entry into Edo on the first day of the Eighth Month in 1590. This day too therefore remained a festival day in Edo until the very end of the shogunate, being known as the ‘first day festival’

(*hassaku*). Leading commoners were invited to celebrations that took place at Edo Castle.

Two nights, on the fifteenth day (*jûgoya*, the night of the full moon) of the Eighth Month, and on the thirteenth day of the Ninth Month, were traditionally designated as moon-viewing (*tsukimi*) nights. On these nights, it was traditional to follow the Chinese custom of placing a few offerings to the moon, such as melons, green soybeans, fruits, rice flour dumplings (*dango*), vegetables, sweet potatoes, and eulalia (*susuki*) plants, on a special table set up in a moonlit place. The table was of the same type as was used in Shintô shrines. Children were told to steal the *dango* used in the celebration as this would bring them good luck.

Old Japan had many popular legends concerning the moon. According to one common belief, it was possible to communicate with a distant loved one by conveying one's thoughts to the moon, which then relayed the message. Another legend told that a rabbit pounding rice for rice cakes can be seen in the full moon. This legend may be of Chinese origin; in China a hare or rabbit was believed to sit at the foot of the cassia tree in the moon, pounding the drugs out of which is concocted the elixir of immortality.

Autumn was the season to go on excursions to view the autumn leaves (*momijigari*). The common people also took up this traditional pastime of the nobles. The area surrounding Edo contained a number of suitable locations for this enjoyment.

The fifth day of the Ninth Month was, just like the fifth day of the Third Month, a traditional servant replacement day.

The ninth day of the Ninth Month was known as *chôyô*, or more popularly *Kiku no sekku* ('Chrysanthemum Festival'). This festival originated in China, although the custom had reached Japan already at the beginning of the Heian period (794–1185). People climbed hills to drink sake with chrysanthemum flower and eat rice mixed with chestnuts to purify themselves and to secure a long life. In Edo, the Chrysanthemum Festival was one of the official events sponsored by the shogunate. In Kyôto and Ôsaka, it was customary to display the Doll Festival dolls at this festival, too.

The 'Cock Fair' (*tori no ichi*, also known as the *Ôtori-sama* festival), was, and is, a special occasion when amulets and good luck charms of all kinds were sold. The festival was held on the day of the cock (*tori no hi*), the tenth day in the Eleventh Month, at shrines dedicated to Ôtori Myôjin throughout the Kantô area, including the famous Ôtori Shrine in Asakusa. The day of the cock was chosen, as the word for cock (*tori*) also has the auspicious alternative meaning 'taking in' or 'reaping'. Numerous stalls were set up during the fair, and amulets of various types were sold. The chief type of amulet put up for sale was, and is, a decorative bamboo rake (*kazari kumade*), which is spiritually used to rake in and pick up good luck during the coming year. The rake vendors added a typical twist to the festival. To ensure continued profits, they said, a larger (and accordingly more expensive) rake must be purchased every year. Bargaining over prices was of course a major part of the fun at this fair, and each deal was finally sealed with rounds of rhythmic handclapping (*tejime* or *teuchi*, originally a Shintô custom – see above).

A number of year-end fairs (*toshi no ichi*) were always held in Edo, to sell decorations necessary for the New Year celebration. The round of year-end fairs began with the one held at the Fukagawa Hachiman shrine on the fourteenth day of the Twelfth Month. On the seventeenth day of the same month, the fair in Asakusa started, on the twentieth, the one at Kanda Myôjin, and on the twenty-second, the one at Shiba. These fairs lasted until the end of the Twelfth Month. The Asakusa fair eventually grew into the Battledore Fair (*hagoita ichi*), of vast popular interest in Edo since the early nineteenth century when it became customary to present battledores as year-end gifts to baby girls born during the year.

From about the middle of the Twelfth Month, itinerant seasonal exorcisers (*sekizoro*) appeared on the streets. Their purpose was to drive out evil spirits as well as blessing bystanders with good luck in the coming year. By the Edo period, the exorciser typically wore a paper hood and a white paper apron with an auspicious design of pine, bamboo, and plum. He went about his task accompanying himself on *shamisen*, drums, and scrapers. Others with similar tasks included the regular exorciser (*yakuharai*), the 'hearth exorciser' (*kamabara*), and the 'shuffling priest' (*sutasuta bôzu*). The latter was said to have originated in practices in which merchants rid themselves of the numerous sins accumulated during the year from cheating in business. Carrying a fan and a priest's staff, a shuffling priest tied a rope band around his head and a straw skirt-like coat around his waist with a sacred rope (*shimenawa*).

By the end of the year, preparations for New Year took much time. The house had to be cleaned, and special food had to be bought. Another important custom in all households was the rice cake pounding (*mochi tsuki*). The glutinous rice used for rice cakes was pounded with a large wooden mallet in a heavy wooden tub. The preparations were not only time-consuming, they were also expensive. Saikaku reports some prices for what the middle classes considered essential New Year decoration. These include bitter oranges (*daidai*). As there was often a shortage of such fruit, the price could be as excessive as two, or even four to five *bu* (that is, more than one *ryô*, or more than a month's income) for only one orange. Saikaku also reported that a special lobster used as a New Year decoration, the regular price of which was a mere three copper *mon*, could easily rise in price up to 500 *mon* in the case of inadequate supply.

At the year's end, 'forget the year parties' (*bônenkai*) were sometimes celebrated in Edo. Such parties had taken place already before the Edo period, and some families considered them an indispensable part of the fun; however, 'forget the year parties' were not yet as common as they became after the Edo period.

The last day of the year was the time when all the balances of payments had to be cleared. Debts had to be paid, and any business transactions had to be concluded (Fig. 10). It was also the time for the end-of-year gifts, presented by those in an inferior position to every superior. Both the day and the gifts presented were known as *seibo* ('year end').

On New Year's Eve, it was customary to eat a special meal of buckwheat soba (*toshikoshi soba*, 'year-crossing noodles', or 'noodles for seeing out the old year and seeing in the new') in the hope that one's family fortunes would extend like

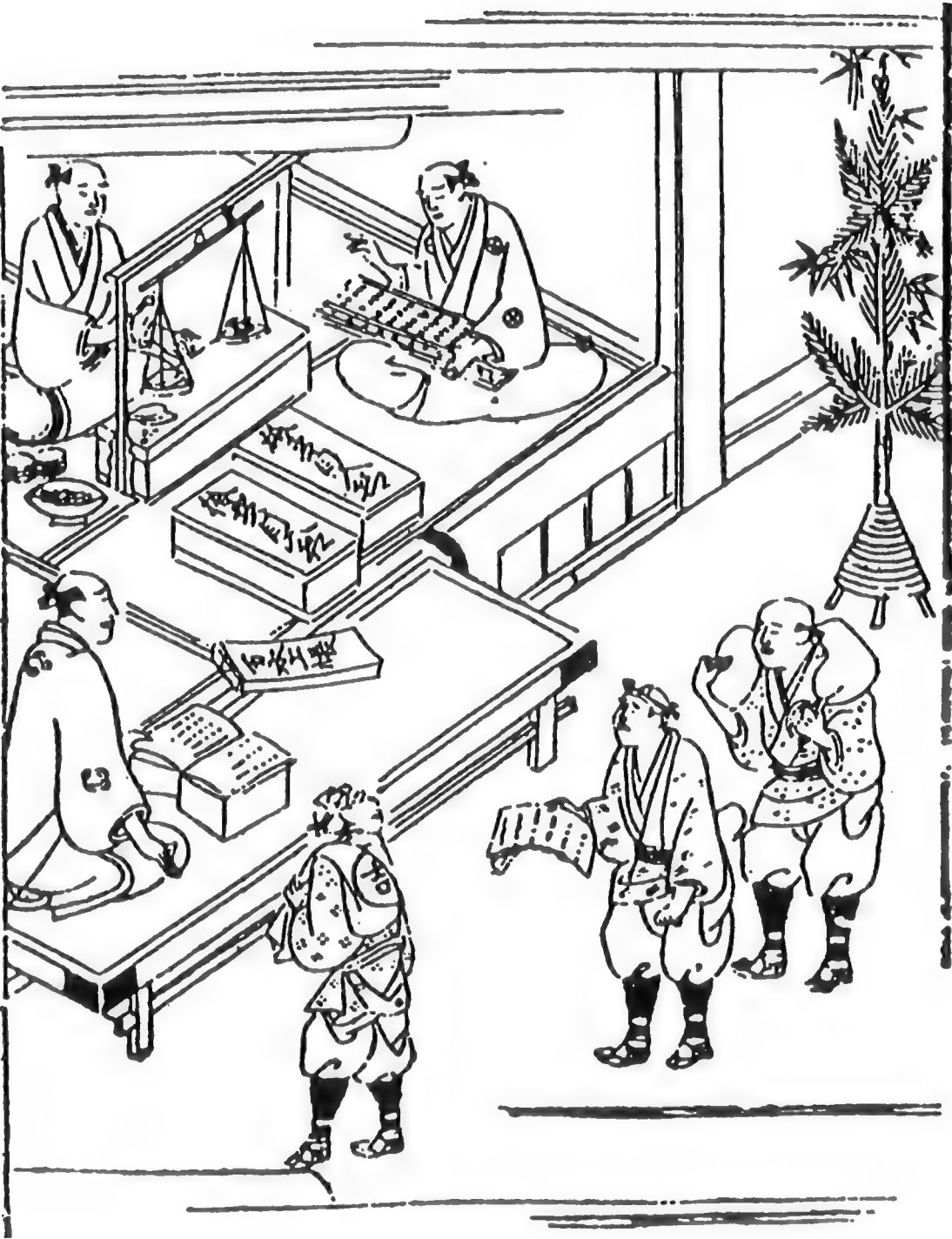


Fig. 10. A merchant settling his accounts on the last day of the year. While the merchant makes entries in the ledger, one assistant checks calculations with the abacus, and another weighs the silver used for payments. Three tradesmen present their final accounts. At the right, a New Year's decoration (*kadomatsu*), made from pine branches, bamboo, and straw.



the long noodles. A number of different theories compete for the origin of this custom. Most common is the belief that the long, thin noodles symbolise the wish for longevity and a long and happy future. Another theory conjectures that the gold and silver craftsmen of Edo used balls of buckwheat paste to collect scraps of precious metal from the floors of their workshops. Eating buckwheat noodles was therefore regarded as bringing good fortune into the next year. On the evening of the last day of the year, it was also customary to go to the temple to ring out the old year (*joya no kane*). According to Buddhist teaching, man is plagued by 108 earthly desires or passions; with each toll of the bell, one desire is dispelled. Thus, every temple bell tolls 108 times to ring out the old year and herald the new. For many, this was also the first temple or shrine visit (*hatsumôde*) of the new year. And this brings us back to the beginning of the annual festival cycle of the Edokko.

## Individual Travel For Pleasure or Profit

### The Pilgrim Tour

Possibly no event in the life of the Edokko may have seemed more fun than going on a pilgrimage. This pleasure was not limited to the rich; even many a poor farmer could eventually raise the funds to go. Wealthier commoners, whether farmers or townsmen, could afford to go quite often. Pilgrimages therefore soon developed into big business and the establishment of not only the sale of religious souvenirs, but also the provision of any conceivable comfort both on the road and in the vicinity of the temple or shrine that was the target of the pilgrimage. Most travel was on foot, but those of some means could rent a horse or travel by boat.

The most popular spot for a pilgrimage was the great and ancient Shintô shrine of Ise, sacred to the sun goddess, the ultimate ancestor of the Imperial dynasty. It was located on the east side of the Kii peninsula, within convenient reach of the Tôkaidô highway. Commoners did not worship at Ise until the sixteenth century, but thence the number of pilgrims increased steadily and the Ise pilgrimage (*oise mairi*) became a general custom throughout Japanese society.

What did the pilgrims look like? Most wore their daily clothes, but efforts were taken to distinguish oneself from non-pilgrims. Most important was the hat. Kaempfer described the typical hat of a pilgrim:

Their hats are very large, twisted of split reeds. Generally speaking their names, birth, and the place from whence they come, are writ upon their hats and pails, that in case sudden death, or if any other accident, should befall them upon the road, it might be known, who they are, and to whom they belong<sup>21</sup>

Not only did the hats announce this information, the home province and the destination were also mentioned, Kaempfer points out elsewhere. The

<sup>21</sup> Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan ... Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, 1, p.227 (London: Thomas Woodward, 1728, first English edition).

similarity to the use of pilgrims' badges in medieval Europe is striking. Both there and in Japan, the pilgrim trusted to his characteristic clothing to be recognised as a pilgrim, enjoy the special treatment due to a pilgrim, and perhaps also receive some small charity.

At Ise, the pilgrim visited the two shrines, inner and outer, that formed the shrine complex, prayed, made a donation, and finally collected a protective tablet and amulet to bring home as a souvenir. The donation depended on the pilgrim's means. In Kaempfer's time, wealthy pilgrims paid as much as one *bu* (a quarter of a gold *ryô*) for an Ise amulet and an almanac. 'Able people will give more by way of charity,'<sup>22</sup> Kaempfer concluded. Although other shrines as well as Buddhist temples were located near Ise and could be included in the pilgrimage, these were not of great importance and not all pilgrims bothered.

What was of considerable importance, however, if one may believe accounts from the time, was the Furuichi, the entertainment street at Ise. Restaurants, cheap eating places, drinking places, brothels, and souvenir stalls were abundant. In addition, theatres were set up in some shrines and temples, although not in the Ise shrines themselves. There the pilgrim could watch Kabuki, puppet drama, and various other kinds of street entertainment. Ise was famous as the fourth most important theatre site in Japan, after the main centres of Edo, Kyôto, and Ôsaka. It was moreover common for itinerant actors from the main theatrical centres to perform at Ise, especially during the summer months. In the latter part of the Edo period, many actors spent the slack season on tours throughout the country.

Most pilgrims were naturally men travelling without their families, so that they could easier enjoy the pleasures available on the road as well as in the Furuichi. However, a few women went, too. To again quote Saikaku:

Many among [the pilgrims] were fashionably dressed ladies, not one of whom seemed to be making the pilgrimage with any thought of the hereafter. Each showed off her clothes and took such pride in her appearance that even Kannon [the Goddess of Mercy] must have been amused at the sight.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the purity aspects of the Shintô religion, female pilgrims had particular problems. Kaempfer sums up their situation as follows:

It is commonly believ'd, that in their holy pilgrimages to Isje, the monthly terms do for that time entirely cease, which if true, must be owing, either to the fatigues of a long and tedious journey, or to their taking great pains to conceal it, for fear their labour and expences should thereby become useless.<sup>24</sup>

Common belief held that adultery committed by a female while on a pilgrimage, or indeed accompanied by any form of piety, made it physically

<sup>22</sup> Kaempfer, *History* 1, p.230.

<sup>23</sup> Saikaku, *Five Women*, p.136.

<sup>24</sup> Kaempfer, *History* 1, p.214.

impossible to separate after sexual intercourse. This was also said to affect a wife engaged in adultery while her husband was away on a pilgrimage.

It was common among both townsmen and farmers to form Ise associations (*Ise-kô*). Each year, the members of such an association contributed a set amount of money to a common fund, and a few members determined by lot were sent on the pilgrimage. Having gone once, the member had to continue contributing to the fund but was no longer eligible to go. Moreover, those who went to Ise would bring back amulets for each member of the association, so spiritual merit would accumulate from the first year of membership. Such was the humble beginning of the great Japanese obsession with bringing souvenirs and gifts back to family, friends, and colleagues after every journey. Later, the Ise association developed into a kind of bank, in which the members each year paid a certain percentage of the cost of the trip, often 10 percent, through which they expected to go after a specified number of years, commonly 10.

The Ise associations soon developed into regular package tours. The Ise shrine – soon followed by the other great shrines – acquired agents who arranged pilgrimages for farmers and townsmen, the entire pilgrimage being treated as a sort of all-inclusive package tour, including all necessary arrangements during the journey and at Ise. As everything was arranged for the pilgrim in advance, such group pilgrimages (*dansan*) immediately became very popular. These agents not only arranged tours. Even those who were too busy or too poor to go on a proper pilgrimage could benefit from the agent's activities. For a fee, the agent sold amulets and inscriptions of the type a pilgrim would have received if he had gone to the shrine in person. Special prayers and requests could also be accepted and forwarded to the appropriate deity, for a slightly higher than usual fee and a gift or two for the agent.

The Ise association and the pilgrim package formed not the only ways to visit Ise. In many parts of Japan, the custom arose to make a secret pilgrimage to Ise, without the knowledge of one's parents or master. The pilgrim, upon returning home, was supposed to be forgiven instead of punished. Pilgrimages also left for other important shrines. Unlike Ise, these were not of nationwide interest but were almost equally important for people living in the region. Such destinations included Itsukushima on Miyajima Island in the west of Japan, and Kotohira (also known as Konpira after the deity of the same name – the protector of seafarers) in Shikoku. Other possibilities, of a more specialised nature, formed part of the ancient mountain cult. Climbing Mount Fuji was an expression of this particular religious feeling. Rest assured, however, that pleasant festivities followed the otherwise quite strenuous religious activities of the Mount Fuji pilgrimage. For the busy man, it was not strictly necessary actually to climb Mount Fuji. Many Edo shrines had miniature models of Mount Fuji in their grounds, enclosed within sacred straw ropes. For the busy merchant, such a miniature could be the object of a miniature pilgrimage during the last day of the Fifth Month and the first day of the Sixth Month. At least one of these miniature mountains still remain, in the Teppôsu Inari Jinja in central Tôkyô. Buddhist pilgrimages were also common, for instance to the 33 Kannon temples of Kyûshû. Local pilgrimages were of course also quite common, both to Shintô and Buddhist sites.





Fig. C3, facing page, top. Collecting shellfish from the sea at the Benten Shrine in Susaki, 1854.  
(Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858)

Fig. C4, facing page, bottom. Sunrise at Shinagawa. Some warrior retainers of a lord carry goods and bow cases along the street. (*The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*,  
by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858)

Fig. C5, below. Travelling by *kago* and mounted on horseback in the morning mist at Mishima.  
(*The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858)



Fig. C6, facing page, top. 35. Crossing the Ôigawa river at Kanaya. (*The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tôkaidô*, by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797–1858)

Fig. C7, facing page, bottom. Preparing to cross the Ôigawa river at Kanaya. (*The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tôkaidô*, by unknown artist)

Fig. C8, below. Enjoying the cool evening on the river near Eitai Bridge, Fukagawa, 1771. (Utagawa Toyoharu, 1735–1814)









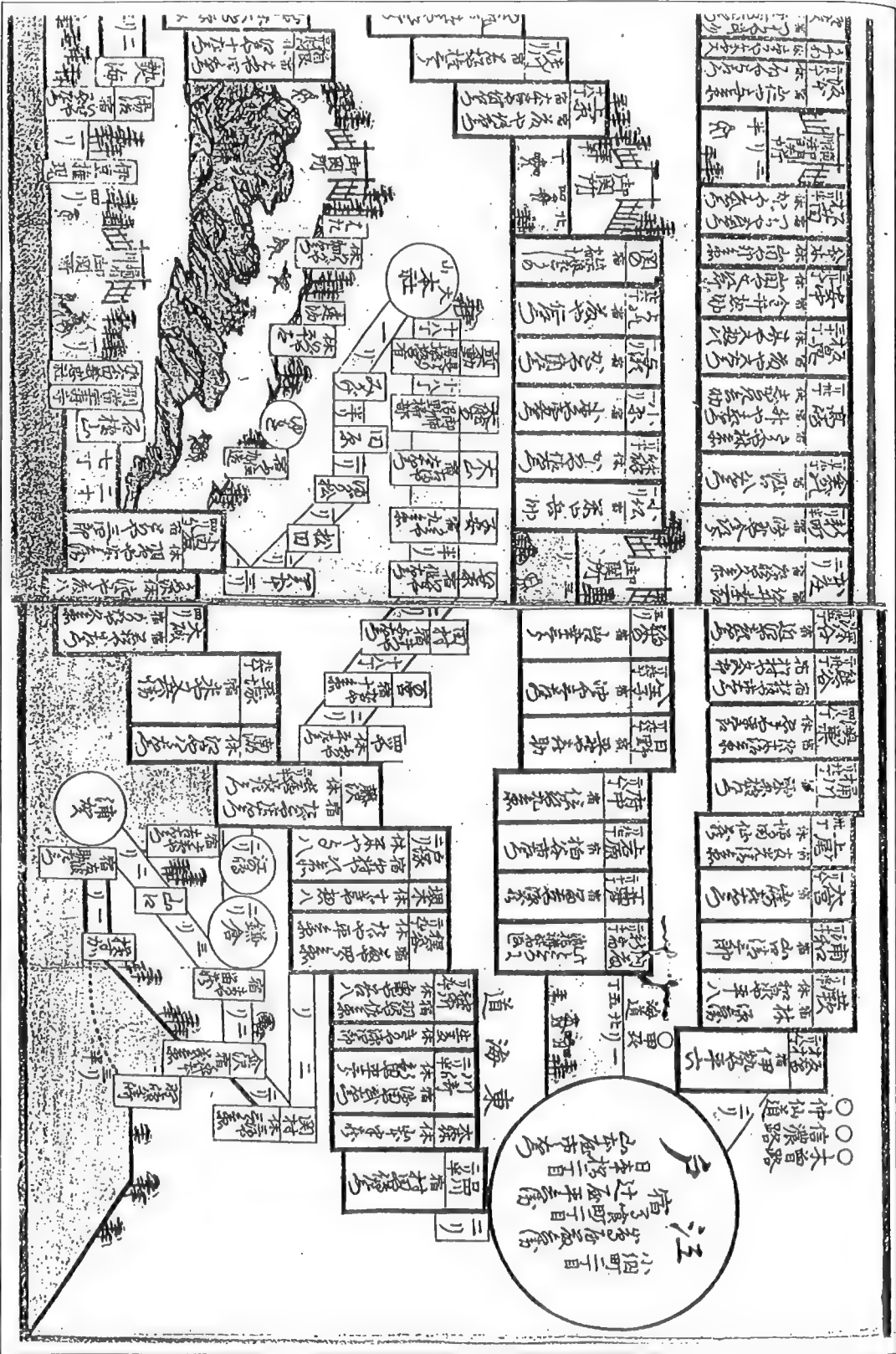
Fig. C9 and enlargement of centre panel. A group of women on a sightseeing tour, in front of Enoshima island and with Mount Fuji in the background.  
(Torii Kiyonaga, 1752–1815)



### Individual Travel

In the Edo period, travellers usually stayed in inns (*hatago*). The first inns of Japan had been establishments that mainly served food, but by the Edo period, most had developed into houses that also offered accommodation. It was usually easy to find an inn, at least on the main highways. In the post station towns, a majority of the houses possibly served as inns of various kinds. There were several different classes of inns, the use of which depended on the social class of the traveller. Feudal lords and warriors stayed in officially appointed inns (*honjin*) or auxiliary inns (*wakihonjin*). When not required for official use, the auxiliary inns were permitted to serve the public. Commoners usually stayed, depending on their status and financial means, in either ordinary inns (*hirahatago*) or lower-class inns (*kichin yado*). Several inns of each type were located in each post station town, and they competed with each other in attracting customers. Each inn provided the traveller with attractive young maids who worked as part-time prostitutes. Most, or all, inn maidservants provided such services at least from time to time. Travellers simply took such a service for granted, as is frequently described in Edo period stories and novels.

Fig. 11. A page from the Naniwa-kō jōshuku zue ('Naniwa-kō pictorial list of approved inns'), showing Edo (the circle to the right) and some of the roads leading out of the city, including the great Tokaidō road (emerging 'below' Edo). Each box indicates a stage of the route.





There were a number of popular guidebooks detailing good, cheap, and reliable inns. Some of them were not designed as books but printed on fans. Kaempfer explains their use:

Upon their journeys they make use of a fan, which hath the roads printed upon it, and tells them how many miles they are to travel, what inns they are to go to, and what price victuals are at. Some instead of such a fan make use of a road book, which are offer'd them to sale by numbers of poor children begging along the road.<sup>25</sup>

Some inns were organised into groups or chains that could be relied on to provide good service. One of these chains was the Naniwakô, named after Naniwa, an alternative name of Ōsaka. The chain was set up around 1804, and advertised as inns where Ōsaka merchants could stay without trouble or excessive expenses. A coupon system could be used to pay for one's stay. Each member inn put out a certain signboard, identifying it as a member of the chain. The member inns also appeared in a certain guidebook, known as the *Naniwakô kôcho* ('Naniwakô notebook of member inns') or the *Naniwakô jôshuku zue* ('Naniwakô pictorial list of approved inns' (Fig. 11). As the Naniwakô inns prospered greatly from this arrangement, similar inn associations were also formed. The Santokô chain was established in Ōsaka in 1830 and the Azumakô in Edo in 1855. Soon after the Edo period, several more were formed. Jippensha Ikku reports that in the 1800s, a stay at an inn cost from 160 to 200 copper *mon* per person. Earlier it was most probably cheaper, as copper had depreciated.

Inn guidebooks formed not the only specialised travelling equipment. Ordinary guidebooks were also common, detailing sights and specialities of each region. Other special travelling gear included, for instance, a bamboo box for food, maybe a gourd used as a water bottle, and a cape (*kappa*) as protection against the weather. Early in the period, as Kaempfer pointed out, travellers even had to carry their own bedding with them.<sup>26</sup> Also included in the travellers' luggage could be a writing set (*yadate* or *suzuribako*), holding a brush and a small ink-stone. Various folding travel equipment was also common, including folding candle holders (Fig. 12) and folding bamboo pillows. There was no need to forego the conveniences of civilised life.

But life on the road was not only conveniences and fun. There were also dangers. These came in many shapes. Palanquin carriers, for instance, did not hesitate to suddenly stop at a desolate mountain pass to demand additional payment to continue the journey. If such payment was not forthcoming, there might be threats of violence or worse. Bands of highwaymen also operated along many roads and highways. Such bands often recruited their members from the ranks of palanquin carriers,

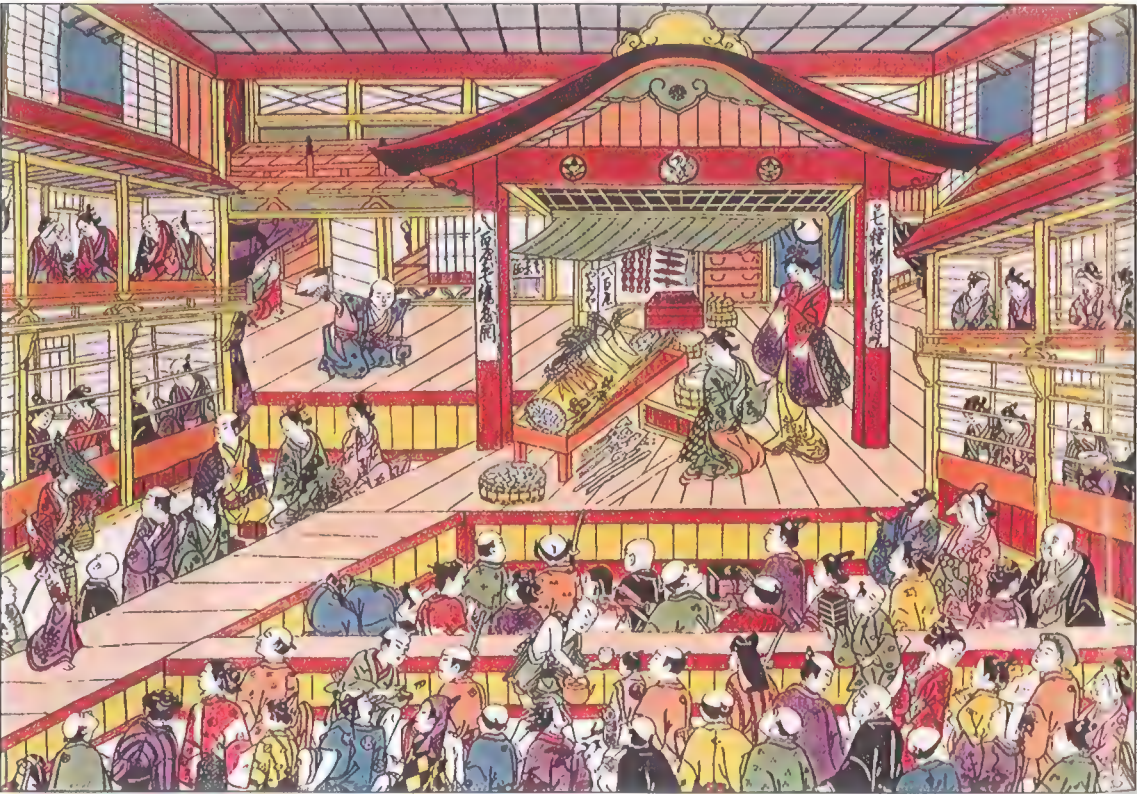
<sup>25</sup> Kaempfer, *History* 2, p.401.

<sup>26</sup> Kaempfer, *History* 2, p.422.



Fig. C10, above. The theatres in Sakai-chô and Fukiya-chô on opening night. (Utagawa Toyoharu, 1735–1814)

Fig. C11, below. Inside the Edo Ichimura-za theatre, early 1740s. (Okumura Masanobu, 1686–1764)



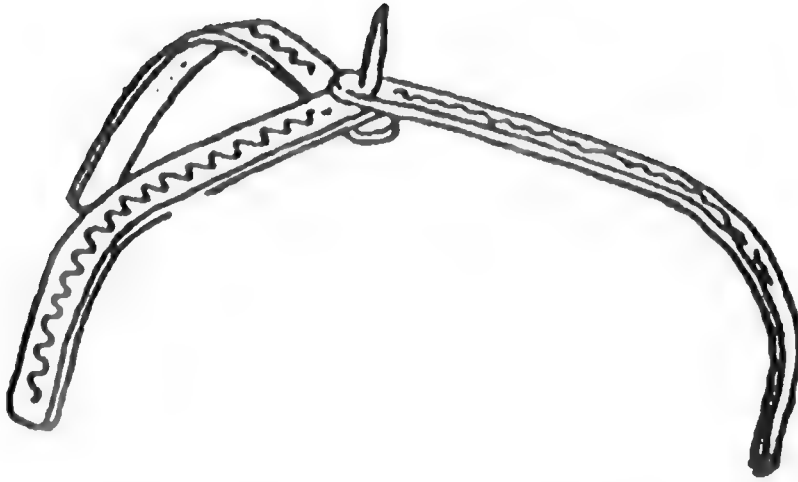


Fig. 12. A folding candle holder, often carried in a traveller's luggage.

making the latter yet more untrustworthy. Boatmen, too, who operated ferries across the numerous unbridged rivers the road had to pass, at times increased their fare halfway across the river. In distant areas, they would not hesitate to threaten a passenger that he would be pushed overboard if he did not pay up.

Where there were no ferries, the water depth may have been slight enough for porters to carry passengers and goods on their shoulders across the river. The shogunate for strategic reasons disapproved of the building of bridges, and the most famous such ford crossed the Ôigawa River on the Tôkaidô road. Here porters were responsible for carrying both travellers and their baggage across the river. The number of them required for any particular load, as well as their remuneration, was fixed by law and varied according to the current depth of the water. Although the depth was usually no more than reaching to a man's breast, heavy rains often made the crossing hazardous or impossible. Where supervision was slack, travellers were forced to pay excess charges, as the porters would go out of their way to wade through deep holes in the river bottom. As the water depth appeared greater, they were entitled to higher fees. Another favourite trick was to discover in midstream that the passenger was so heavy that only a large bonus payment would enable the porters to deliver him safely to the other side. In addition to these dangers, the roads were also the homes of vagrant thieves, confidence men, and other unsavoury characters. Most commoners had to stay in shared rooms, so there was little safety against thievery and less privacy. Hygiene was not always up to even the low standards of the Edokko commoner. There was always the risk of disease. If a guest at an inn fell ill and died, the innkeeper was technically responsible for the burial of the deceased and the notification of his kin. These were serious expenses, and many innkeepers were therefore known to refuse service to travellers who appeared ill. Less scrupulous innkeepers had ill guests carried away at night and dumped in desolate places, whether the guest was still alive or not.





### Plate 3. Shogunate fireman officer.

(Illustration by Georgio Albertini  
© Helion & Company 2022)

Armed with the customary two swords and a *saihai* (commander's baton), nobody can doubt the authority of this officer, who is dressed in protective gear of the highest quality and price, including a fireman's cotton and silk breastplate (*muneate*), a sturdy fireman's helmet, a thick *haori* coat, and robust *hakama* trousers.

# Entertainment

## The Role of Entertainment

In its early days, the shogunate was a pure military government. It was therefore natural for government officials to be more concerned with military affairs than civilian matters and the needs of the military more than the needs of the civilian. The latter was, after all, in the government's opinion only somebody who provided essential services to the military. This did not matter only in the provision of supplies. During the first half of the Edo period, many entertainments for the samurai were denied to the commoner. Later, the class barriers began to break down, as lesser samurai turned impoverished while numerous merchants with social aspirations began to take up leisure pursuits and hobbies formerly restricted to their betters. These merchants also paid handsomely for adoption into samurai families either for themselves or for their sons.

Despite this upward mobility, the entertainment in Edo almost at once developed into and then remained a townsman's kind of entertainment. It became centred upon two closely connected phenomena, the brothel district and the popular theatre. The shogunate recognised that the lower ranks, especially of the troops, needed sexual relief. There was, however, at first an eminently practical and then purely moralistic fear that uncontrolled license would develop. Such behaviour, after all, tends to cause poor discipline among soldiers. Another important factor, whether it was realised by the authorities or not, was that Edo always had more men than women. It was well known that most of the warriors who had been barracked in the new city were single, but so were most of the craftsmen, workers, and merchants who formed the new townsman class in Edo. As late as by the mid eighteenth century, men outnumbered women two to one. From then onwards, the imbalance slowly decreased, and a century later the imbalance was no longer much more pronounced than in modern Tōkyō (which also has slightly more men than women).

The shogunate therefore set up separate brothel districts in all great cities and towns. This made the entertainment easier to control, and there was less fear that criminals and malcontents would hide among the denizens of the entertainment world. The town magistrates kept a close watch on

the districts, and especially on those individuals who appeared to take up permanent residence there. Fugitives from justice were not encouraged to hide in the red-lantern district. The ability to control the district had indeed been presented as an advantage in the original application for a licensed brothel quarter in 1612, as at that time there were numerous houses of ill repute scattered all over the city. Some of them were undoubtedly refuges for *rônin* and other disreputable characters.

Despite the importance of the brothel district, it must be remembered that prostitution remained rampant also elsewhere in Edo. In addition, similar entertainment was also allowed travellers at the four neighbouring post stations of Shinagawa, Shinjuku, Itabashi, and Senju, as they lay outside the city limits. The theatres, too, soon grew into fronts for prostitution or unlicensed behaviour. Nevertheless, the Edokko craved entertainment, and for him, entertainment equalled the provision of sex. Prostitution and the theatre thus formed the main inspiration for virtually all types of popular entertainment in Edo.

## Music and Musical Instruments

Entertainment demanded music. Both prostitutes and actors relied to some extent on proper musical accompaniment. Female musicians at most times formed yet another group of the vast numbers and types of prostitutes in Edo. They, too, belonged to those female groups who were forbidden to practice their professions by the sumptuary edicts issued between 1841 and 1843, in an effort to stem prostitution, increase morality, and lessen the townsmen's expenses. Despite this, music formed an important part of Edo culture. However, not all of the several styles of traditional Japanese music were heard in Edo. Ancient court music (*gagaku*) and the music played in the Nô drama (*nôgaku*) were not common music for the Edokko, although a few wealthy amateur townsmen along the Tôkaidô formed cultural groups dedicated to playing the music. He, and she, preferred more modern tunes. This also affected the choice of musical instruments. The *shô*, a vertical free-reed mouth organ for use in court music, soon fell out of favour except with the nobility. Another musical casualty was the *biwa*, an ancient type of short-necked plucked lute with usually four or five strings, played with a plectrum (Fig. 13). This instrument, too, remained common mainly in court music and as an accompaniment to Buddhist chants.

Since ancient times, some musical instruments were reserved for the exclusive use of women, others for men. Flutes (*fue*) were, for instance, regarded as exclusively male instruments (Fig. 14). These came in many types: straight, cross, and fipple. One of the latter, the bamboo *shakuhachi*, usually a little more than 54 cm long, was only used by the *komusô*, mendicant members of the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism, all masterless men of the warrior class. By the Edo period, the choice of musical instruments tended to be separated according to social class. This was especially true of the newer types of music and musical instruments.



Fig. 13, above. Court music. In the foreground, a man playing the *shō* (mouth organ). Behind him, a man playing the *biwa* (lute)

Fig. 14, right. Young man playing the flute (*fue*).







Fig. 15, left. Woman playing the *shamisen* (lute).

Fig. 16, facing page. Woman playing the *koto* (zither).

The *shamisen* (Fig. 15), a long, three-stringed plucked lute similar to the banjo in appearance, was considered to be uniquely a townsman's instrument. However, to quote from the miscellany *Shizu no odamaki* ('Endlessly repeated lamentations'), published by the samurai Moriyama Takamori (1738–1815) in 1802: 'The popularity of the *shamisen* today is of formidable proportions: scions of noble families, eldest sons and heirs, second sons, third sons – none fails to strum the three-stringed *shamisen*. In mountain or in moor, from dawn till dusk, its sound echoes incessantly.'<sup>1</sup> A few years later, in 1833, the Kyûshû scholar Shôji Kôgi (1793–1857) noted that 'the sound of the *shamisen* is enough to put lewd thoughts into the mind of a saintly priest with years of Zen meditation behind him.'<sup>2</sup> The *shamisen* was commonly used to accompany Kabuki and the puppet drama. The three strings were made of twisted silk, and the instrument was played with the help of a plectrum (*bachî*). The skin of the *shamisen* was made of cat or dog skin. There are many different sizes of *shamisen*, varying from 1.1 to 1.4 m

<sup>1</sup> Translation from Chie Nakane and Shinzaburô Ôishi (eds), *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan* (Tôkyô: University of Tôkyô Press, 1990), p.205; citing *Ensekijishshu*, 1st vol. (Tôkyô: Chûô Kôronsha, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Dore, *Education*, p.48; citing Shôji Kôgi, *Keizai mondôhiroku* (reprinted in *Nihon keizaisôsho*, pp.22–3), p.74.



in length. The *shamisen* soon became the favourite instrument of the geisha. The *shamisen* is the musical instrument that best represents the new musical styles and tastes of the Edo period, being from the very beginning associated with the theatres and entertainment quarters. It developed from a musical instrument apparently imported in the third quarter of the sixteenth century from the Ryûkyû Islands, where it was known as *jabisen* ('snake-skinned strings') because snake skin was used in its construction. The *shamisen* was perhaps ultimately of mainland Chinese origin. In Ôsaka and Kyôto, the *shamisen* was known as *samisen*.

Among the older musical instruments, the *koto* (Fig. 16) remained a favourite. The *koto* is a large plucked zither or horizontal harp made of paulownia wood modelled on the Chinese *kin* (*ch'in* in Chinese), with 13 strings of equal tension made of silk, toned by movable bridges (*kotoji*) to the required mode. While the right hand plucks the strings, the left hand presses the strings behind the bridge to alter the tone. A seven-stringed type, known as *shichigenkin*, remained popular with the literati. From the late sixteenth century, *koto* music (*sôkyoku*) generally developed into a solo repertoire. During the Edo period, *koto* music, too, was much affected by the new music of the *shamisen*.

Another new musical instrument was the *kokyû*, a long-necked bowed lute (Fig. 17). It was held vertically and played with a horsehair bow. This, the only bowed musical instrument of Japan, was derived partly from the *shamisen* and partly from the Portuguese rebec. The *kokyû* was often said



Fig. 17. Woman playing the *kokyû* (bowed lute).



Fig. 18. Playing the hourglass drum (*tsuzumi*).

to have originated in Manila, but it appears as if this musical instrument actually entered Japan from the Ryūkyū Islands, probably at the end of the sixteenth century. It did not become common until in the early eighteenth century, but by then it was widely used as a folk instrument. By the middle of the century its use also spread to Edo. There the *kokyū* was frequently played in trio with *shamisen* and *koto*. During the 1780s a fourth string was added to the Edo *kokyū*.

A variety of drums and tambourines also remained popular in the musical exploits of the Edokko. The large barrel-shaped nailed drums (*taiko*) were especially common during festivals and to announce Kabuki performances. They were also used as part of the Kabuki music. Smaller laced drums with hourglass shapes (Fig. 18), often but not exclusively called *tsuzumi*, were also common. They consisted of two leather skins, each sewn onto an iron ring larger in diameter than the drum body, and then laced with cords onto the lacquered wooden drum. These drums, too, were often used in Kabuki music.

## The Floating World

The 'floating world' (*ukiyo*) was the general name for most types of Edo entertainment, or at least those connected to the brothel district and the theatres. The term *ukiyo* (written with Chinese characters meaning 'sad world') was originally a pessimistic Buddhist notion of the world being a place of sadness and pain. From the late seventeenth century, however, the word changed both meaning and spelling. Rewritten with characters meaning 'floating world' it completely changed meaning and from then on had connotations of 'fashionable' and 'erotic'. In Edo, the truly fashionable dandy became a 'floating world man' (*ukiyo otoko*). He would spend his

time in the licensed entertainment quarter, and when relaxing from his hard duties in entertaining himself, he would read 'floating world novels' (*ukiyo zôshi*) or look at 'floating world pictures' (*ukiyo-e*), that is, woodblock prints.

The fashionable image of the floating world was defined already in 1661 by Asai Ryôei (died 1691), the first professional writer of Japan, in his *Tales of the Floating World*:

Living only for the moment, giving all our time to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, cherry blossoms and maple leaves. Singing songs, drinking sake, caressing each other, just drifting, drifting. Never giving a care if we had no money, never sad in our hearts. Only like a plant moving on the river's current; this is what is called *ukiyo* – The floating world.

The writer Saikaku had a slightly less romantic notion of the floating world. As in a reply to Asai, he described in 1686 how the young Seijûrô was disinherited, after being caught by his angry father busily squandering the family fortune with a group of friends and prostitutes. Although disinherited, he and his friends pretended that they had no cares in the world and soon forgot the unpleasantness:

Not so the proprietors of the pleasure house, however, whose hospitality soon showed signs of cooling. When the guests clapped for service there was no answer. Nor was there any soup when the time for it came. Tea was brought in by hand, two cups at a time, instead of on the usual tray. And the servants, as they left, turned down the lamp wicks to dim the room. Finally, one by one, the courtesans were called away.<sup>3</sup>

So much for never giving a care if one had no money!

In Edo, a *yûkaku* ('play area') – entertainment district – was founded in 1617, when a license was granted to Shôji Jinemon (1576–1644) for pleasure quarters on formerly swampy but by then reclaimed land near Nihonbashi. Shôji had – at least according to the story of his life written by his descendants – already petitioned for this in 1612. The Yoshiwara entertainment quarter, located near Ningyô-chô ('doll town') in Nihonbashi, famous in the Edo period for its many doll shops, opened in the Eleventh Month of 1618, with Shôji as general manager. The quarter was not considered completed until in 1626, however. The name Yoshiwara originally meant 'reed-field', from the nature of the ground. This name was hardly suitable for a glamorous entertainment district, so later the first of the two characters used in writing the name (*yoshi*) was changed to another with same pronunciation; the name suddenly translated as 'auspicious field'.

The Yoshiwara was not the first licensed brothel district in Japan. Such districts had been in existence since 1585, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi established a licensing system based on the Chinese pattern. In China, licensed brothel districts had a long history. The elegant word for the

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3 Saikaku, *Five Women*, p.44.

brothel quarter was *karyūkai* ('world of flower and willow'), the Japanese pronunciation of a Chinese term used by the famous Chinese poet Li Po (701–762) in referring to the institution.

The first Yoshiwara district, despite being a brothel district, had the same duties as any other neighbourhood in Edo. This included civic duties such as keeping firemen. Apparently, the Yoshiwara firemen were not diligent enough: from its foundation until 1643, Yoshiwara burned down no less than four times, and burned again in 1646 and 1654. Partly because of the risk of fire, and partly because Yoshiwara had become embarrassingly close to the centre of the growing city, the brothels were in the Tenth Month of 1656 ordered to move to a more remote location. After the fire in 1657, Yoshiwara dutifully moved to a new site at the eastern outskirts of the city, in Senzoku just beyond present Asakusa. The new site was completed by the Eighth Month of the same year. To make the removal more palatable, Yoshiwara was then also freed from the duty to supply firemen, and an impressive amount of money (10,500 *ryō* of gold) was paid to assist in the cost of building the new quarter. The new site – Shin-Yoshiwara ('New Yoshiwara') – was also larger than the old, about 320 m from north to south by 215 m from east to west. The old Yoshiwara had been merely 215 by 215 m.

Although a few moralistic condemnations of the daily indulgences in Yoshiwara were issued from time to time, most public censure of men going to the entertainment district came from the fact that they were wasting money and valuable working time, not cheating on their wives. Besides, a wife was always expected to stand behind her husband, paying his bills without jealousy or resentment. Her chief duty was, after all, to produce and raise her husband's children, look after his household, and perhaps assist in his business. Japanese men traditionally claimed the freedom to enjoy outside entertainment whenever they felt so inclined. In addition, the glamour of Yoshiwara was a powerful reason to visit. A real connoisseur or sophisticate (*tsū*; *tsūjin*; the word came in vogue around 1769–70) had to keep up his reputation, and such a reputation might even assist him in more mundane business activities, as the increased respect he was met with facilitated new contacts and deals. There were those who had to ask their dutiful wives to sell off clothes to provide sufficient funds to continue having fun in Yoshiwara. The sophisticate was also known in eighteenth-century Edo as *tōrimono*, *tōri* being a different reading of the same written character, meaning a man with a thorough knowledge. But sophistication in this sense was not mere spirit but a tangible asset that one could, indeed should, display. The *tsū* or *tōrimono* had by the 1770s turned into a faddish dandy. From the 1780s, lists of the most famous dandies – 'The Eighteen Great *Tsū*' – were instant bestsellers, treating these sophisticates as celebrities and paragons of fashion and style. Other bestsellers detailed the knowledge expected of a sophisticate, so that even a poor trader could aspire to this for him impossible role. On the other hand, popular literature revelled in the comical attempts of boorish country yokels (*yabo*) who made ridiculous and invariably failed attempts to get into the glamorous society of Yoshiwara. Some of these yokels were indeed wealthy merchants of Ōsaka; as long as they did not realise the importance of proper Yoshiwara etiquette, they were treated as nobodies.





Fig. C12. A winter party of revellers who drink sake, enjoy food served on lacquered dishes, smoke tobacco, and listen to music played on the *shamisen*. (Utagawa Toyoharu, 1735–1814)



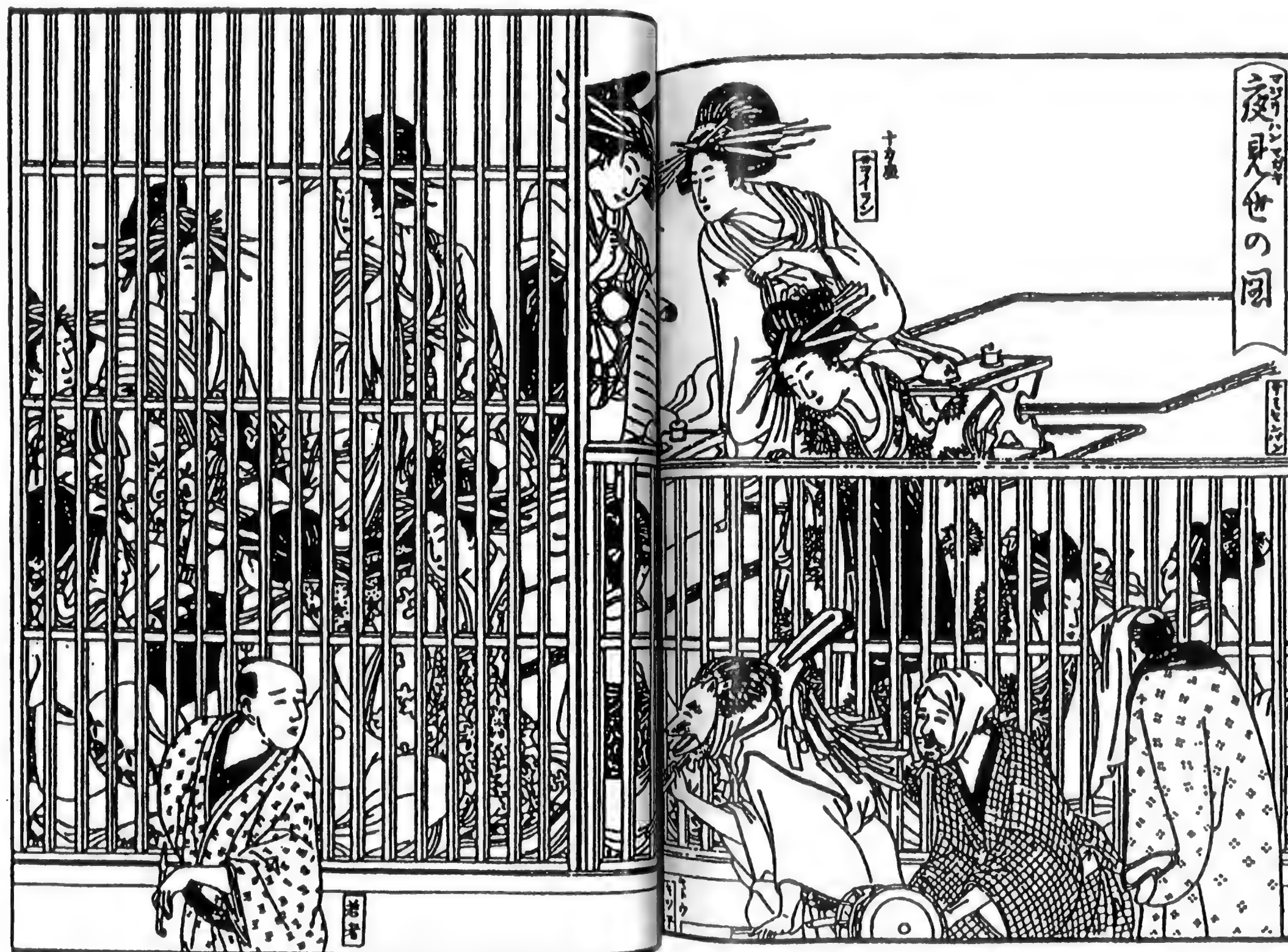




Fig. 19, previous page. The display window (*harimise*) of a house of pleasure.

The approved route to Yoshiwara began with a boat trip up the Sumida River. The boat landed at a disembarkation point, where horses were available to clients of some means. During the seventeenth century, the most fashionable way for a samurai to visit Yoshiwara was to dress up in a white silk kimono, white leather *hakama* and *haori*, and wear swords with white hilts and scabbards. He then rented – for twice the ordinary price – a white horse with an attendant. Mounted on the white horse and accompanied by the attendant, the guest proceeded to Yoshiwara and his favourite house of assignation. The new Yoshiwara was a rectangular, fenced, and moated enclosure. A single entrance led through the *Ômon* ('Great Gate') on the centre of the north side. The moat which surrounded Yoshiwara was filled with infamously dirty water, accordingly known as the 'Teeth-blackening-liquid Moat' (*ohaguro-dobu*). The moat prevented prostitutes from escaping and customers from leaving without settling their bills. At the entrance, a number of 'basket hat tea houses' (*amigasa chaya*) made a thriving business, among other favours also renting deep woven basket hats to those patrons who wished to enter the quarter incognito.

Having passed through the gate, the eyes of the customer first fell upon the Nakanochô, the central street lined with tea houses of assignation (up to – at the latest – 1760 known as *ageya*, thereafter replaced by in all essentials similar tea houses known as *hikitejaya*, 'tea houses that take one by the hand'). From this central street, he would turn into one of the famous 'five streets' (*gochô*) of Yoshiwara where the houses of pleasure were located. The number of main streets in the new Yoshiwara were actually six, as well as several smaller ones. The streets were laid out in a grid pattern, so that not even the most drunken customer could get lost. Willow trees were planted both on the streets and by the gate, as the willow was an old and suitably poetic Chinese symbol of prostitution. Facing the street, the houses of pleasure had windows with wooden grills (Fig. 19). Girls of the lower grades sat behind these display windows (*harimise*) as an advertisement for the pleasures available within, often engaging in conversation and jokes with the passers-by. Most houses had vertical bars in their wooden grills, but the lowest class of establishments appears to have used horizontal bars, so as to identify themselves to poorer customers. Mere spectators would soon be identified and abused, however, and men from the brothels might also appear to rough them up. Yoshiwara was a place for paying participants, not for spectators.

High-ranking courtesans lived in the houses of pleasure known as *ômagaki*, named after the complete lattice window at the entrance. Other houses of pleasure with courtesans had the same style of lattice, but with lattice covering only three-quarters or half the window, depending on the class of the house. The guest would first visit one of the tea houses of assignation, where he would request a certain courtesan to be called. Lists of the courtesans were available, together with descriptions of their beauty and perhaps also portraits. These tea houses acted as agents of the true houses of pleasure. In theory, the tea house was in charge of all procedures, and the customer was presented with a final bill from the tea house, preferably when he was too drunk to really understand all the various items of the bill, or the next morning when he suffered a hangover. The tea house then paid

the proper amount to the brothel twice a month, on the fourteenth and the last day of each month. Some tea houses also doubled as places to be used for illicit romances and other intrigues. This, however, was frowned upon by the authorities. The Yoshiwara was strictly for play only, not for causing disagreeable disturbances.

After a courtesan had been chosen, a servant of the tea house accompanied the customer to the brothel (*yorôya*). High-ranking courtesans, however, did not meet the customers on the premises but instead proceeded with their retinue to the assignation tea house, where the customer was waiting. The customer could not expect to get intimate until his third visit, and each occasion required dining and partying with mandatory attendance of male comedians (*hōkan* or *taikomochi*, the latter word meaning 'drum-carrier') and male or female musical entertainers (*geisha* and *onnageisha*, respectively; *geisha* means 'accomplished person' and *onna* means 'female') in both the tea house and the house of pleasure. If the courtesan was of lower rank, or the formalities had already been fulfilled, things became more easy-going when the customer had reached the brothel. The party began with the guest or, more commonly, guests calling for sake. This was served either by menservants or maids. Singing and dancing ensued, and the increasingly intoxicated guests were encouraged to join in. Other revelries included games such as blind man's buff (Fig. 20). Eventually, the courtesans (including those of the highest rank, if present) were persuaded to join in the fun. Most would then pair up for the remainder of the night. Although a few guests left in time to get back home before the gates were shut for the night, most stayed until morning. Spending a night with a high-ranking courtesan was a costly business, and only the wealthy could afford it. Others had to content themselves with lower-ranking courtesans or mere street prostitutes. There was a great variety of brothels of different rank and quality, the fee (*agedai*) depending on the class of the establishment.

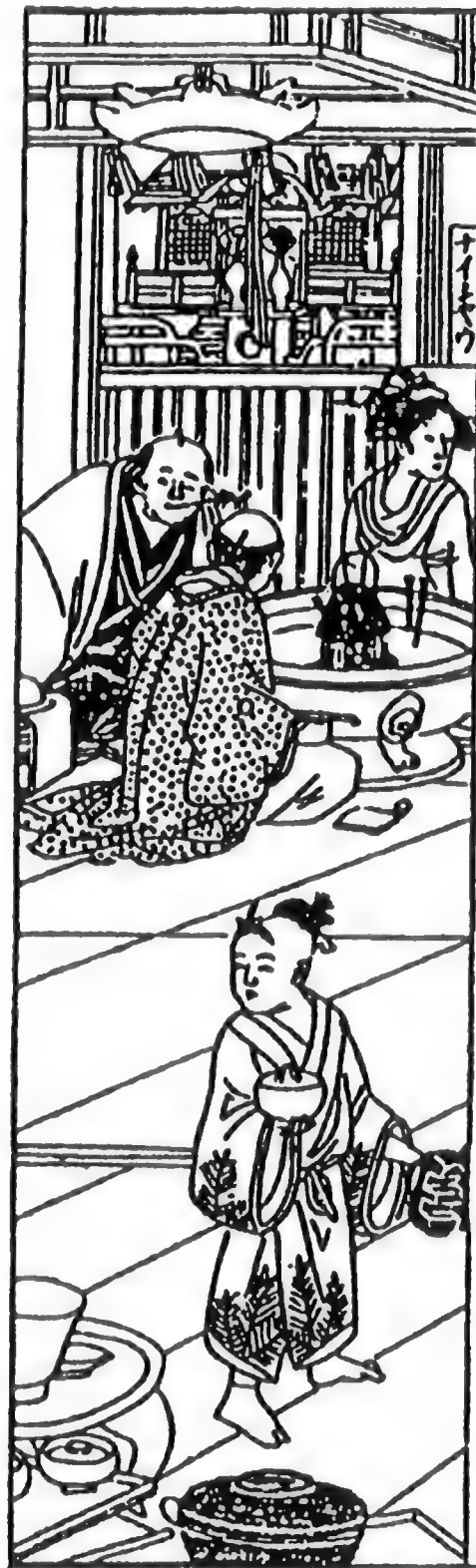
Venereal diseases (aptly known as 'flower and willow diseases') did occur in Edo period Japan, and especially syphilis and gonorrhoea seem to have been common. The Swedish physician Thunberg, who visited Edo in 1776, was astonished by the prevalence of venereal disease.<sup>4</sup> Even a personage such as Tokugawa Ieyasu is believed to have suffered from venereal disease and he was known as a frugal man without serious illnesses.<sup>5</sup> The medical condition of the more fashionable and free-spending dandies in Yoshiwara can then easily be imagined. It has been estimated that the incidence of venereal diseases among all citizens were as high as 30 or perhaps 40 percent.<sup>6</sup> This is hardly surprising, as it was commonly believed that sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman was the best cure for venereal disease.

Fig. 20, overleaf. Fun and games in the house of pleasure. In the far left, behind the group around the brazier, there is a large religious altar.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Peter Thunberg, *Resa uti Europa, Africa, Asia, förrättad åren 1770–1779*. 4 vols. Uppsala; Johan Edman, 1788–93. Also published in English as *Travels in Europe, Africa, and Asia, Made between the Years 1770 and 1779* (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1795), Vol. 3, pp.224–5.

<sup>5</sup> *Tōdaiki: Shiseki zassan* (Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1911), 2nd vol., pp.85, 98, and 104.

<sup>6</sup> Yamamoto Shun'ichi, *Nihon kōshō-shi* ('History of legalised prostitution in Japan') (Tokyo: Chūō Hōki Shuppan Gaiisha, 1983), p.3.



大の要慎



### The Prostitute

The numerous brothels and entertainment districts, licensed or unlicensed, had a plentiful supply of women. The Yoshiwara counted an average of 2,000–3,000 women in as many as 200 separate establishments. In or around 1642, there were 987 prostitutes in Yoshiwara, divided among the about 200 brothels. In 1720, 3,000 women (most but not all prostitutes as *kamuro*, the child attendants of the high-ranking courtesans, were also included in the census) lived in the district. In 1725, the total population of Yoshiwara was 8,679, of which 3,907 were women. In the Kansei period (1789–1801), over 3,800 women were recorded. Other estimates indicate numbers as high as around 4,000 in 1790; 5,000 in 1800; 5,111 confirmed prostitutes and 157 female geisha in 1848; and 7,000 by 1868. By this time, some estimates indicate more than 10,000 girls in the licensed quarter, although the size of the quarter had remained unchanged. Although the true number may not be known, one may only presume that when the cultural accomplishments of the prostitutes declined, the managers found it safer to rely on numbers.

The non-prostitute population of Yoshiwara also grew. It also became increasingly common for dependents of various kinds to make a home in the entertainment quarter. This included an increasing number of semi-professional male entertainers (*nodaiko*, meaning talentless drum carriers), many of whom had no other choice after squandering all their money on the brothels.

A few women entered the floating world on their own initiative, for fun or profit, or more commonly after being deprived of a livelihood by divorce or the death of a husband. Many, however, maybe most, were the daughters or in a few cases even the young wives of destitute farmers. Farmers, who could not pay the tax in rice or cash in times of famine or other disaster, had to sell their daughters. For the purpose of buying girls from impoverished families, professional procurers known as *zegen* were employed. As the shogunate forbade the outright sale of human beings, the girls were indentured with contracts for fixed periods, usually 10 years. Although technically speaking a father received a loan (*minoshirokin*, 'body money') in return for the use of the daughter's services for a certain number of years, it was by no means certain that she could go back home after that time. Often the father remained destitute, and he would have to extend the contract in order to obtain a further loan. Besides, many prostitutes died young. In practice, the women were little more than slaves. The average length of life in Yoshiwara has been estimated to be 22 years.

An easier way to get out from the business was to find a wealthy customer who was willing to repay the money advanced by the owner of the establishment to the woman's father. He could then buy out the girl to make her his mistress, or in a few extreme cases, his bride. This was known as 'redemption' (*miuke*). This course of action was never cheap. A high-ranking courtesan commanded a high price; many hundreds of gold *ryō* were frequently paid to ransom such a woman. In 1700, the courtesan Usugumo II, a *tayū* of the Miura-ya, was redeemed for 350 *ryō*. The courtesan Segawa V was redeemed in 1775 for the incredible price of 1,400 *ryō*. Her successor Segawa VI was redeemed for 1,500 *ryō*. In the 1790s, the law stipulated the maximum price for redemption to be 500 *ryō*. Even the latter price, it

must be remembered, was the equivalent of around a 150 years' income for a maidservant or more than 50 years' income for a clerk. As the girls accepted being sold in order to help their poor parents, the procurement system soon acquired quasi-moralistic overtones. There was thus no actual condemnation of either the system or its consequences. Indeed, being sold to help one's parents was an act often loudly praised as a good example of proper filial piety.

Yoshiwara society was highly stratified. The courtesans were divided according to rank. Up to c. 1761, the order of ranks was as follows: The highest rank was the *tayû*. The customer could only meet such a courtesan by way of a proper and elaborate tea house of assignation introduction. The second-highest rank was the *kôshi*. It was common to get an introduction by way of an assignation tea house, but sometimes a trip to the brothel was sufficient to meet a courtesan of this rank. Her title derived from the fact that she spent much of her time sitting in a latticed parlour, hence the name *kôshi* (lattice). The third rank was named *sancha*. This rank came into existence between 1665 and 1668 when as many as 512 illegal tea house waitress-prostitutes were moved into Yoshiwara. The name was derived from their former trade, as *sancha* signified an inferior grade of powdered tea. Such tea did not require the 'shaking' in hot water expected of superior-grade tea, and in Yoshiwara, 'shaking' meant rejecting a customer. A *sancha* did not 'shake' a customer, and her former occupation was also undoubtedly a reason for the new name. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, an inferior subclass of *sancha*, known as *umecha*, was created. This subclass remained popular for some decades until the class became known as *heyamochi* in the last half of the eighteenth century (see below). An even lower class of courtesan was the *tsubone*. She acquired her title due to the fact that she operated in a compartment (*tsubone*). Such a courtesan was definitely low class. The lowest class of Yoshiwara courtesan was known as *hashi*. She did her job, period.

The highest classes of courtesans were usually too expensive even for the most generous-minded Edo connoisseur. Already by the last decade of the seventeenth century, fewer than 10 *tayû* remained. In 1761, the last *tayû* retired and the two highest grades of courtesans, *tayû* and *kôshi*, had become superfluous due to their high cost. The ranking system was therefore changed so that the *sancha* grade was moved to the top of the ranking list. To assist all those who made money by ranking and promoting courtesans, this grade was in the same year split into three categories. All three categories of courtesan were from then on known as *oiran*, or high-ranking courtesan.

The highest category of *oiran* was from then on the *yobidashi*. As before, such a high-ranking courtesan could only be met by appointment through a tea house. The second-highest category was called *chûsan*. Courtesans of this category spent their time waiting in a latticed parlour. The third-highest category was known as *tsukemawashi*. The meaning of the name is unknown. So is their particular function. As before, courtesans of lower rank, that is, not of *oiran* rank, remained in plenty. The highest of these ranks was the *zashikimochi* ('having one's own suite'). This was a fairly high-ranking courtesan, who as the name implies had a drawing room of her own and a

child servant (*kamuro*), as well as other amenities. Indeed, this rank was later also included among the *oiran*. Definitely lower was the *heyamochi* ('having one's own room'). She could operate only from one room, possibly with the help of one child servant. This type of courtesan was heir to the inferior subclass of *sancha* known as *umecha*. Lowest among the true Yoshiwara courtesans was the *shinzō* ('newly launched boat'). She was a young girl, who in most cases had begun her career as a child servant. The *shinzō* in later years served basically as an attendant to a higher-ranking courtesan, but she also accepted customers. There were naturally even lower types of prostitutes within Yoshiwara. Among them were the *kiri* (short-time), the *kashi* (moat-side), the *shirokumise* ('4–6 shops', that is, prostitutes who cost 400 *mon* at night and 600 *mon* during the day), and the *teppō* (gun). The lowest class of Yoshiwara prostitute was the *kirimise* ('short-time shop'), who could be found at the far end of Nakanochō near the moat. There a customer got a fixed time for a fixed price, no questions and no frills.

To lure the poorer customers in the right direction, the brothel-keeper Mokichi of the house Manji-ya in 1848 even distributed a handbill bearing a picture resembling the famous shop Echigoya's sign, advertising ladies for 'spot cash, no fancy prices', exactly the policy which had made the Echigoya famous among silk merchants. He also attempted to cut out the tea houses and their expensive commissions by Echigoya-like methods of advertising and payment policies. But this was not all. In 1851, as many as four brothels advertised special discounts and distributed fliers throughout the city. The brothel-keeper Ishinosuke of the Yamato-ya, for instance, reduced the price of *zashikimochi* from one *bu* to three *shu* (a 25 percent discount), *heyamochi* from three *shu* to two *shu* and six *monme*, *shinzō* from two *shu* to one *shu*, and geisha from two *shu* to one *shu* and six *monme*. He even threw in sake and food in the deal, and happily promised to change the prostitute if the customer was not pleased with her.

High-ranking courtesans – unlike their more unfortunate low-class colleagues – received a wide training in many arts, including etiquette, singing, dancing, music such as *koto* and *shamisen*, calligraphy, poetry composition, and tea ceremony. A courtesan usually began her career at the age of five to seven as a *kamuro* (child servant) to a high-ranking courtesan. Between the ages of about 13 and 16, she was officially launched as apprentice courtesan (*shinzō*), wearing a distinctive kimono with long sleeves (*furisode*). In this respect, and in others, the soon-to-be courtesan followed a mock version of the coming-of-age ceremonies of a non-prostitute girl. Her initiation as a courtesan followed a ceremony which in many ways symbolised the marriage of a young woman. This included, for instance, a special celebration and the blackening of the girl's teeth. There was also usually a bidding among the more favoured customers for the privilege of deflowering the *shinzō*. This ceremony was known as 'launching' (*mizuage*) the new courtesan. After a customer had been chosen, the ritual required that the prostitute performed a pledging ceremony with the customer, before intimacies began. This ritual consisted of yet another mock version of the wedding ceremony: a filled sake cup was sipped three times by both customer and courtesan. Only thereupon did the official deflowering take place.



The courtesan then advanced through the ranks. A truly beautiful girl skipped the lower ranks and was immediately promoted to one of the inherited house names (*myōseki*), if any was unoccupied. Most had to advance slower. First to the rank of *heyamochi*, then to *zashikimochi*, and eventually to *oiran*. The ranking lists of the courtesans have already been referred to. Such were plentiful, and in fact among the most popular genres of Edo publishing. Not only the publishers made money from the sale of these lists; the brothel-keeper also utilised the possibility of advertising his women and benefited accordingly. The rank of a courtesan depended not only on public relations, however. Her appearance, skills, artistic accomplishments, cultural refinement, and fashion also played important parts.

A courtesan of high rank had certain privileges, especially in the field of fashion and luxurious living. The highest-ranking class of courtesan also had, in theory, the right to refuse a customer she did not like or did not know. This right, however, usually meant no more than that a more expensive courtship was necessary to win her approval. Although some top courtesans were immortalised in popular fiction and credited with refusing to accept ugly or boorish lovers, most of them could not afford to be too choosy. The brothel proprietor would punish her, by beating if necessary.

All courtesans assumed new names in the brothels. These were invariably simple and cheerful, and apparently always given by the brothel proprietors. Common names included Neko ('Cat') and Chidori ('Plover'). Others – of the highest ranks – used inherited house names, such as Hatsugiku ('First Chrysanthemum of the Year'), Takao ('High Ridge', probably named after a famous and beautiful mountain in Kyōto), and Segawa ('Rapid River'). The high-ranking courtesans were usually famous for beauty and skill in the various arts. The courtesans also became widely regarded as the leaders of fashion, even among respectable women. Curiously enough, they were also viewed in a very romantic light, especially in popular novels and plays, in which the courtesan in most cases was regarded as having all womanly virtues, including chastity. This was, of course, far from the truth. Most customers in Yoshiwara went with the undisguised intention of sleeping with a woman, even if other entertainment also was available and indulged in. The grade of the woman the customer could get depended solely on the price he was willing to pay.

One of the grand spectacles of Yoshiwara – and there were many others – was a high-ranking courtesan's procession (*oiran dôchû*) to the tea house to meet her client. She proceeded in stately splendour through the main street of Yoshiwara, accompanied by an entourage of attendants, some 20 or 21 persons, and clad in her finest kimono, laden with robes and ornaments. Like a married woman, the courtesan tied her sash in front. The elaborate costume of the highest-ranking courtesans often weighed as much as 20 kilogrammes. From the early nineteenth century, the courtesan also wore incredibly high, stilt-like *geta*, so high that she was almost, but not quite, unable to walk unless an attendant was there to support her.

In the late Edo period, there were several Yoshiwara festivals. They generally honoured the passing of the seasons and the seasonal flowers. All were celebrated on regular festival days, although most celebrations were

slightly adapted to the particular circumstances of Yoshiwara. The three Yoshiwara holidays, the only days of the year when the courtesans did not need to work, were the New Year's Day on the first day of the First Month, the Cherry Blossom Parade on the third day of the Third Month (or any other clear day), which was maybe the most important and entitled the courtesans to leave Yoshiwara and go on an excursion, and the twelfth or thirteenth day of the Seventh Month, the day of the *Bon* festival. Other celebrations – but not holidays – were the Iris Festival on the fifth day on the Fifth Month, and the Chrysanthemum Festival on the ninth day of the Ninth Month. Another curious Yoshiwara event was the custom known as 'heaped bedding' (*tsumiyagu*), in which each courtesan displayed her bedding, to demonstrate her popularity and the wealth of her patrons. The bedding was especially commissioned for the occasion, in gold and silver brocades and coloured silks, and consisted of an extraordinary number of layers of quilts, often five or seven layers. The display remained for the day, unless it was a particularly splendid set. Then it could remain on display in a tea house for as long as three months, before it was used. Any display of bedding, and in particular a luxurious one, often led to the promotion of the courtesan.

How much did the Edokko pay for his pleasures? The cheap *shirokumise*, prostitutes of the later Edo period who cost 600 copper *mon* during the day and 400 *mon* at night, have already been mentioned. Higher-ranking courtesans cost considerably more. Prices can be checked according to the ranking list, beginning with the old ranks and then comparing with the new ranks. The highest old class, *tayû*, was customarily priced at from one to one and a half *ryô* of gold. The next rank, *kôshi*, was priced 30 to 50 percent less than the *tayû*, at one *ryô* of gold. The third rank, *sancha*, was considerably cheaper, priced at about a quarter to one-half *ryô* of gold. Even cheaper was the *tsubone*, who cost only three or five *monme* of silver (about 0.05–0.08 *ryô* of gold). The lowest class of Yoshiwara prostitute, the *hashi*, cost about one *monme* of silver or 100 copper *mon* (depending slightly on the rate of exchange). The price for a *tayû*-class courtesan was at one time set as low as 58 *monme* of silver, but this did not mean that a customer needed to pay only this amount. An additional mandatory charge, for instance, was 18 *monme* for her attendant. In addition, food, sake, entertainers, and tips to at least a dozen palms were required. The price therefore easily reached about 150 *monme*, or two and a half gold *ryô*, for an evening's fun.

The writer Saikaku (much earlier) suggested tips – to the tea house proprietor, the tea housemistress, the female brothel supervisor (*yarite*), the menservants (*wakaimono*), who indeed together expected half a *ryô* in tips, the tea house at the entrance to Yoshiwara, and the *amigasa chaya* – to total about 7.65 *ryô*. In addition, Saikaku pointed out that the visitor also needed to pay for friends, one or two entertainers (*taikomochi*), and refreshments. The total cost would certainly exceed 10 *ryô*. He also estimated that to keep a high-ranking courtesan as a mistress would cost about 29 silver *kanme*, or more than 483 gold *ryô*, a year. This equalled a stunning 50 years' salary for the average townsman clerk, more money than he could ever expect to earn during a lifetime of hard work.

The later ranks relied on a different and often cheaper price list. Among the *oiran*, the *yobidashi* cost three *bu* per day or night, or three-quarters of a gold *ryô*. The next rank, *chûsan*, cost three *bu* per day. The third rank, *tsukemawashi*, cost two *bu*, or half a *ryô*. Among the lower ranks, the *zashikimochi* cost one or two *bu*, while the *heyamochi* cost merely one-half or one *bu*. Again, the total cost of the evening was much higher. In the early 1780s, the basic price for engaging one of the highest-ranking courtesans was three *bu*. Other expenses were added to the bill, however, so the total cost has been estimated to be at least five gold *ryô* and one *bu*. This equalled about half a year's income for the average townsman clerk. Almost everybody at Yoshiwara, whether manservant, supervisor, tea house owner or mistress, entertainer, and courtesan attendant, expected a tip of one *bu*. Even the tea house lantern carrier expected a tip of 0.3 *bu*. Similar prices can be found in novels by Jippensha Ikku, written in the 1800s. He points out that even the lowest class of prostitute invariably pushed up the bill by the inclusion of items such as three or four rice cakes (400 *mon*), some rice balls (200 *mon*), sake (180 *mon*), and even candles (50 *mon*). By his time, these costs could be haggled down approximately 25 percent. It was definitely not good manners to haggle, but on the other hand, it was in any case not good manners to visit the lowest class of prostitute. Ikku even presents the horrifying price of engaging a courtesan without any intimacies. Although the courtesan then in theory attended for free, the bill ended up as follows:

Use of room	1,500 <i>mon</i>
Refreshments	300 <i>mon</i>
Soup	150 <i>mon</i>
Other comestibles	1,030 <i>mon</i>
Cake	250 <i>mon</i>
Sake	686 <i>mon</i>
Candles	124 <i>mon</i>

The courtesan, too, expected a tip. She had no salary and could only keep whatever customers gave as tips or gifts. From this, she had to pay numerous high fees to the brothel owner. In 1816, it was said that a *chûsan* courtesan had to bring in at least 500–800 *ryô* a year in tips only to sustain herself. If she did not make it, she had to amass a considerable debt to the brothel owner. The expenses of a courtesan were extravagant, even to wealthy Edokko. In the early nineteenth century, bedding cost approximately 50–100 *ryô*. A courtesan needed more than 10 tortoiseshell hairpins, costing as much as up to 15 *ryô* each, meaning another 100–200 *ryô* taken together. These prices were inflated, but courtesans always paid extravagant prices. Much earlier, Saikaku reported that expensive hair combs for women cost as much as two *ryô*. Clothes were appallingly expensive. The courtesan needed several seasonal changes.

Not every customer found himself able to pay the extravagant prices charged by Yoshiwara, when he awoke in the morning. A non-paying

customer sometimes found his belongings and even clothes confiscated by the brothel servants. More common was to rely on a collection agent. Towards the end of the Edo period, there were two main types of collection agents. The first type was known as *tsukiuma* or *tsukeuma* ('the following horse'). In this case, a man known as *uma* ('horse') was sent together with the debtor to his home, or wherever he could raise money to pay his debt. Many a debtor attempted to evade his 'horse' in the crowds on the way home, so this method was not always reliable. It accordingly became common to call in specialist collection agencies, appropriately known as *umaya* ('horse traders'). The collection agency earned a commission on whatever cash or valuables it was able to recover. The collection agency frequently engaged low-ranking policemen to serve as 'horses'. The other type of collection agent was the *shimatsuya* or settling agent, who bought unpaid claims from the brothel, or indeed any other firm, for half the amount due. In Yoshiwara, the settling agency often kept the debtor imprisoned in a room while a debt collector was sent to his home. If the debtor's family or friends were unable or unwilling to pay for the bill as well as a handling charge, the agency confiscated the debtor's clothes and instead gave him an old cotton kimono or at times only a towel to cover himself on the way back home. This type of agency, too, often engaged low-ranking policemen as agents.

As the etiquette in Yoshiwara became increasingly stifling and elaborate, and as the cost of entertainment rose to unparalleled heights, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of dozens of illegal, unlicensed pleasure quarters (*okabasho*) throughout the city. These quickly became very popular with ordinary townsmen. At the end of the Edo period, there were said to be no less than 40 such districts in Edo. Other observers counted no less than 162 areas of illegal prostitution.

While licensed prostitutes (*kôshô* or *yûjo*, 'pleasure girl') existed only in the licensed quarter, unlicensed prostitutes (*shishô*) were found around the fringes of Yoshiwara and also in the other, unlicensed areas. An unlicensed prostitute had little or no chance to become a licensed prostitute. But to fall from licensed to unlicensed prostitute was all too easy. Many women were forced to leave Yoshiwara only to join a brothel in one of the unlicensed quarters. Not every unlicensed prostitute worked in a regular brothel. The population of Edo always included more men than women, so there was a real need for sexual services. The majority were therefore unlicensed individual prostitutes (*kakushibaita*). These came in many different categories, and the Edokko loved to categorise his women. One of the more remarkable types was the feigned nun. Such women (*bikuni*) dressed as Buddhist nuns and usually shaved their heads. Ostensibly singing Buddhist hymns, they could often be seen on the roads around the major cities and towns (Fig. 21). Earlier, nuns of the shrines at Mount Kumano (Kii Province) had roamed the country begging alms. In return, they transmitted the oracles of the gods, distributed amulets, and explained pictures of Heaven and Hell. They also sang hymns, accompanying themselves on clappers (*binzasara*). Kaempfer noticed them, and wrote: "They are, in my opinion, by much the handsomest girls we saw in Japan ... [but] for ought I know, they may be, tho' never so religiously shav'd, full as impudent and lascivious, as any whore in a publick

bawdy-house.<sup>7</sup> Saikaku lamented that these nuns offered themselves to any almsgiver at the price of 100 copper *mon*. Thunberg also once expressed his satisfaction with such a nun, but in such a way as leaving to his reader's imagination exactly what kind of nun she was.

*Shirabyôshi* were dancing girls who kept up the rhythm of the music with clappers (*hyôshi*). They were naturally also available for other services. This type of prostitute had existed for hundreds of years in Japan prior to the Edo period, but the type may have fallen into general oblivion already at the very beginning of the period. More common were for a long time the *yuna* (bath attendants) of the public baths. In the early Edo period, young women were usually available to wash the customer. Special services in closed compartments inside the bath were also available. The shogunate frowned on these practices, and consequently decreed that from 1627 only three *yuna* were allowed in each establishment. Most bath houses nevertheless continued to employ from 20 to 30 *yuna*. These wore cotton kimono. The most beautiful women waited in the large parlour, serving tea and talking to customers. Others were inside the bath, washing and shampooing customers. Some establishments even closed the bath at 4:00 p.m., after which the women changed into silk kimono and applied cosmetics. Sake was served and music played. In 1648, the use of female bath attendants was twice declared illegal, but this had little if any effect. From 1657, in connection with the removal of Yoshiwara, the *yuna* were again prohibited, more than 200 bath houses were closed, and many *yuna* were relocated to the new Yoshiwara.

The inns, especially those along the highways, always employed young waitresses known as 'rice scoopers' (*meshimori*). These were available as sexual partners so according to law, only three were permitted in each inn. No innkeeper could afford to follow the law if he wanted to stay in business, so there were always more. Edo indeed counted numerous types of unlicensed prostitutes, usually identified only by colourful nicknames, variously translated as 'golden cat', 'silver cat', two relatively expensive categories, and the definitely low-class 'boat tart', 'night hawk', or 'kick-for-a-roll'. One may safely assume that there were less differences among these various groups than the Edokko pretended. There were naturally also male prostitutes (*kagama*) in Edo. As noted, Buddhist monks were notorious for their demands among these professionals.

The refined but rather decadent experience a customer could have with a high-ranking courtesan can be easily imagined. Formalities, followed by food, drink, and games, formed the main part of the evening, which usually



Fig. 21. Mendicant nuns (*bikuni*).

<sup>7</sup> Kaempfer, *History* 2, p.434.





Fig. 22. A musician.

culminated in sexual intercourse. But what about a visit to the lower ranks of prostitutes? This was a completely different experience. Food and drink may or may not have been served, depending on the occasion. The prostitutes had certain games in which to drag their customers. These games were seldom if ever practiced by the higher grades of courtesans but were common among the lower grades. One such game was known as 'naked islanders' after the inhabitants of tropical islands far away from Japan. The game was exactly what the name promised. The prostitutes would take off their clothes, so that the customers could playfully inspect them. Another diversion in lower-class brothels was a dance called the onomatopoeic word *chonkina*, an eighteenth-century description of which has survived into the present. After the usual introductions, the performance began:

The dancing girls were moving in a slow, swaying movement ... Suddenly the music stopped. All the girls froze into position. Only one girl – too late – made a final gesture. She was still moving after the others were still. Everyone laughed. The guests began to shout. The girl who had failed to stop in time began to untie her sash. Expressionless, she dropped the sash on the floor. The music began and all waited; again it stopped. Another loser lost her sash. A girl lost her kimono, then her undershirt and stood staring half-naked at the men ... The game went on and the guests slapped each other across the table, broke sake cups gleefully and shouted like animals in rut ... The guests were stumbling to their feet, joining the dancers and beginning to get rid of their swords, dropping their robes ... Some of the lamps were blown out ... With drunken, fumbling shouts, the orgy continued.<sup>8</sup>

### The Geisha

The description of the life of courtesans and prostitutes leads us invariably to a description of the *geisha* ('accomplished person'). A geisha should not be confused with the courtesan. A geisha was not a courtesan, but a musical entertainer (Fig. 22). Nonetheless, most geisha functioned in certain respects as prostitutes, and it is easy to see why the two groups are frequently confused.

8 Théo Lésoualc'h, *Erotique du Japon* (Paris: Pauvert, 1968). This translation from the French by Stephen Longstreet and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: The Pleasure Quarters of Old Tokyo* (Tôkyô: Yenbooks, 1988), pp.83–85.

Originally, a geisha was either male or female, skilled as a musical entertainer. Most were indeed male. In Yoshiwara, all geisha were male until about 1760, and only from 1775 did female geisha become more common than male ones. They did not usually compete with the courtesans in the marketing of sexual favours, at least not until the 1780s and 1790s. A geisha's hairstyle was simpler than the courtesan's, adorned with only one or two hairpins, and her clothes were also less impressive, usually a monochrome crested kimono. The female geisha had developed out of the dancing girls (*odoriko*), young teenage dancers who – in Edo – were at first employed solely for their dancing skills in upper-class households. Soon, of course, dancing girls became more known for sexual services than dancing skills. By then, many dancing girls, although dressed like young unmarried women, were of more advanced age. By the 1750s, many, especially in Fukagawa, began to call themselves *geiko* or geisha, dressing up in the *haori* coat of the male geisha.

In Fukagawa, the geisha were known as *tatsumi* ('southeastern') geisha, and in every respect operated as prostitutes. Other Edo geisha, such as those operating in Ryôgoku, Yanagibashi, Tachibana-chô, Yoshi-chô, and Yotsuya, were more known for loose morals than for outright prostitution. A geisha was officially a female entertainer. Her skills were various but always included singing, dancing, or playing a musical instrument. As was noted above, the attendance of geisha was mandatory when hiring a top-class courtesan. But the geisha was there as an entertainer only. The customer could, and would, not change his mind and choose the geisha rather than the courtesan for his sexual attentions. In Yoshiwara, the cost of hiring a female geisha as entertainer was one *bu*, or a quarter of a gold *ryô*, for the time it took for two sticks of incense to burn. Geisha were usually hired in pairs, so the cost was actually doubled.

Yoshiwara geisha, unlike other geisha, dyed their teeth black in the way of courtesans and married women. Geisha, however, always tied their obi in the back rather than in front, as they unlike the courtesans who customarily wore their obi knot in front were not regarded to be 'married' women. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that an ordinary geisha (or for that matter, a male entertainer) would very often, if ever, refuse the advances of a rich and generous customer. And with the decline of Yoshiwara after the Edo period, the difference between high-ranking courtesan and geisha diminished.

## Public Performances

### Actors and the Stage

The theatre came to Edo early in the history of the city. The shogunate had a very ambivalent attitude towards actors and public performances. Actors were needed to provide diversion among the troops. However, actors were according to the Confucian philosophy regarded as undesirable outcasts.

The popular entertainers of the preceding historical periods had been socially unacceptable and classed as 'riverbank people' (*kawaramono*). This name was given to them as they tended to live along the banks of rivers in the space that was free from permanent buildings because of annual flooding.

Actors continued to be associated with river banks into the Edo period, and the first theatres were set up near the rivers, often where a bridge provided a steady stream of travellers. Originally, the term *kawaramono* had also included many craftsmen who plyed their trade from temporary workshops along the river banks. After the sixteenth century, the term was virtually restricted to actors and entertainers. They were therefore often contemptuously branded 'riverbank beggars' (*kawarakojiki*). In Edo, actors and entertainers formed the most respectable class of the various kinds of outcasts in Japanese society.

It was said that 'Yoshiwara and the stage are but two sides of the same coin' (*Yoshiwara to shibai wa sai no ura omote*). Both were equally reprehensible from the point of view of the Confucian scholar. On the other hand, the true Edokko loved performances of every conceivable kind. There was a famous saying, comparing the major cities of the Edo period. 'The son of Kyôto ruins himself over dress; the son of Ôsaka ruins himself over food; and the son of Edo ruins himself by watching things.' The theatre in Edo had certainly come to stay.

### Kôwakamai

Actors were officially outcast, as long as they worked as such. There were, however, many types of actors, some more discriminated against than others. Those, who entertained the samurai class, or taught them the art of acting, were naturally considered more respectable than others. In the early part of the Edo period, this was especially true of the ones who performed the *kôwakamai*. This was a simple narrative dance, performed to samurai audiences by three men to texts taken from old war tales. The texts were recited or chanted, and originally accompanied by two hourglass drums (*tsuzumi*) and a flute. The *kôwakamai* actors were approved by the shogunate and even allowed the privilege to wear the two swords of the samurai class. Their status as seen by the samurai class was thus considerably higher than the performers of the Nô plays, the aristocratic drama usually associated with refined taste (see below).

The *kôwakamai* originated during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, and there were some 30 different types. Although for a while popular among samurai, the *kôwakamai* was largely forgotten by the end of the seventeenth century.

### Nô

The Nô ('art; ability') drama had developed in the early fourteenth century from two popularly inspired types of dance music, *dengaku* and *sarugaku*. Although derived from popular roots, Nô soon became an upper-class entertainment (Fig. 23). The process was accelerated when laws and rules for the Nô drama were formulated by the Shintô priest Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333–84) and his son Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443). These rules have remained unchanged since. Actors thereupon formed themselves into family guilds or schools, five of which developed. Nô entertainment grew very popular, especially with the warrior class. In the Edo period, interest in Nô declined somewhat, even though Nô was also taken up by many commoners, especially in western Japan.

Nô was considered a serious form of entertainment, but it remained entertainment. Between the plays, comic interludes (*kyôgen*) were held to

amuse the audience. Nô was not the only drama performed to entertain. Kabuki (see below) and the puppet drama (see below) was also seen in a great lord's residence from time to time, but ostentatiously only for the entertainment of the lower ranks of the household.

The Nô actors were tightly organised into families, by birth or adoption, and were divided in clear status hierarchies within their profession. Women took no part as actors. The shogunate supported the five schools of Nô. Some actors were promoted to samurai rank and received a stipend of up to 8,000 *koku* a year. Although not as popular with the public, Nô plays were sometimes given to selected Edo townsmen within the walls of Edo Castle. There was, accordingly, a certain amount of exchange between the Nô actors and the more popular Kabuki actors. This exchange was even more pronounced in Ōsaka, where controls were more relaxed. Kabuki and Nô actors were in any case considered to be more or less equal in public status.

### Kabuki

The Kabuki theatre was an immediate artistic hit in Edo. Kabuki typified Edo culture more than any other pursuit. Unlike Yoshiwara, every Edokko could afford to see Kabuki at least occasionally. The Kabuki theatre originated in a kind of *risqué* revue led by Okuni (born 1572), a former priestess who claimed to hail from the famous Izumo Shrine (but in fact may have been from the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, where she danced already in 1582). From about 1603 to 1612, Okuni performed each summer in the dry riverbed of the Kamogawa River in Kyôto. Okuni, dressed in male dress, led a troupe of girls in tantalising sensual song and dance numbers and simple dramas, often with erotic themes. Of the latter may be mentioned dramas about Okuni herself and the ghost of her lover Nagoya Sansaburô, who had been killed in a brawl. Because of Okuni's outrageous dress, she and her troupe became associated with the *kabukimono* ('crazy ones' or, more charitably, 'eccentrics').

The 'crazy ones' were the outrageously dressed members of the various street gangs that terrorised Japan's leading cities. Gang warfare was endemic in Edo (and in other cities, including Kyôto) at this time. As the emerging theatre owed much to its portrayal of the 'crazy ones' and their exploits, the name Kabuki stuck to the genre. Okuni, who was said to have once danced before Toyotomi Hideyoshi, later returned to her native province. She shaved her head in retirement and died towards 1640.

At first, aiming their efforts at lower-ranking soldiers and commoners, the Kabuki troupes specialised in plays of overt violence and eroticism. Women were banned from taking part in performances from 1629, because of their role in prostitution – and as fights often broke out among the audience of plays starring women. Attractive boys (*wakashu*) were for the same reason banned on the stage from 1652. The authorities by then also required all Kabuki plays to be based on the comic *kyôgen* interludes of the Nô drama. Many such plays were therefore adapted for Kabuki use. At around this time, the approval of the authorities to build permanent Kabuki theatres was granted for the first time. From the 1680s, the violence and eroticism of the Kabuki drama were partially curbed, and women hence formed a larger part of the

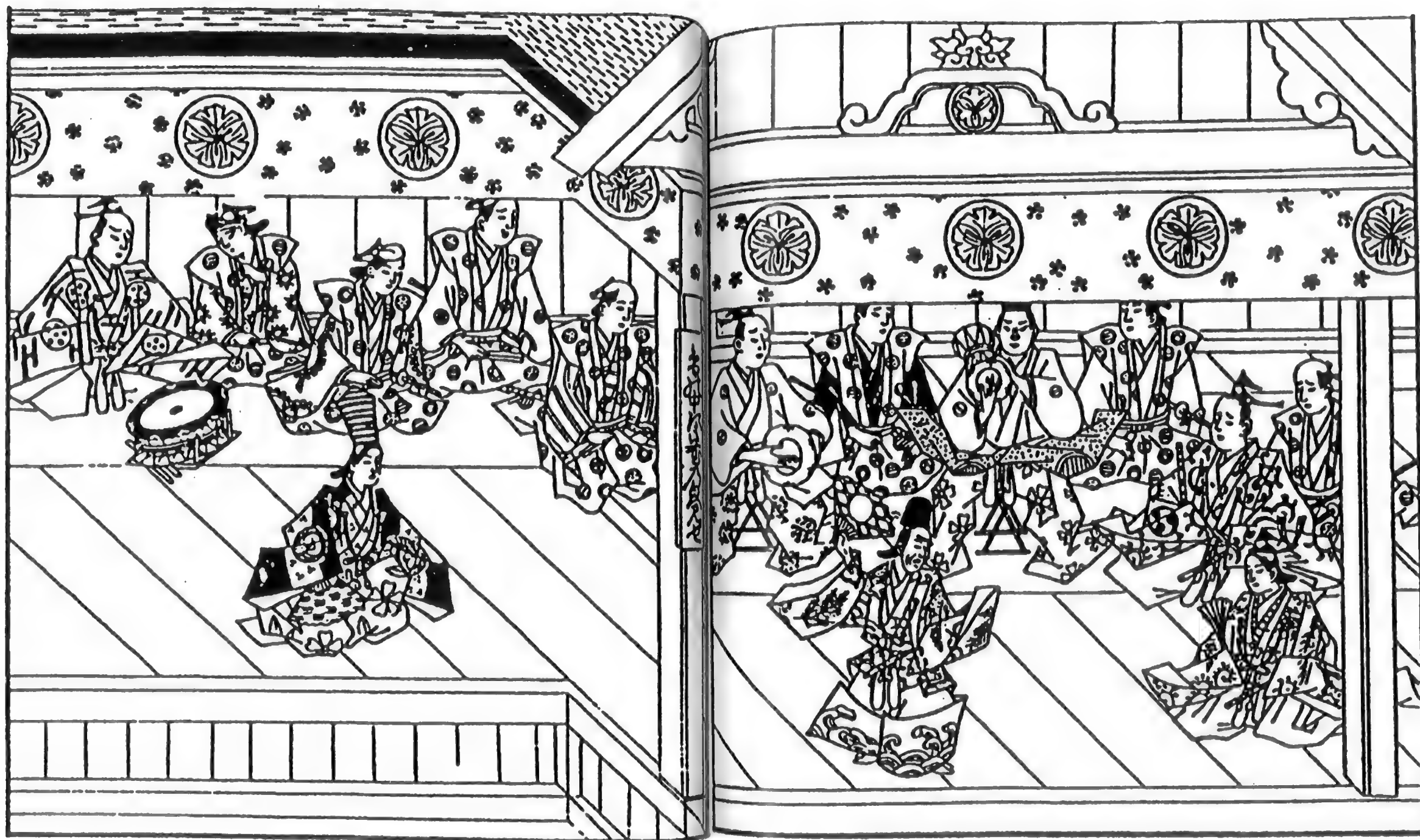


Fig. 23. The Nô drama.





Fig. C13. Kabuki actor playing Ôboshi Yuranosuke, the leader of the Akô rônin. In reality, Ôboshi Yuranosuke was called Ôishi Kuranosuke. The playwright had to change the name to avoid censorship. (Utagawa Toyokuni, 1769–1825)



Fig. C14. Kabuki actor Ichimura Uzaemon plays Ōboshi Yuranosuke, in formal attire.

audience of every theatre. The gaudy, spectacular, and sensational effects of the Kabuki remained, however. After all, this was what the audience desired.

The shogunate in its attempts to curb the excesses of the Kabuki drama was not merely concerned about the respectability of the entertainers. It was commonly believed that the plays had a disastrous effect on the morality of their audiences. For this reason, the warrior class was not permitted to view the Kabuki. Farmers, too, were at first excluded. The shogunate reasoned that farmers had to be protected from any experience that might cause them to think that the livelihood in the city would be better than life on the farm. It was believed that if farmers were allowed to learn of the easy-going life in Edo, they would ruin the country by escaping en masse to the cities. Undoubtedly this was true. Numerous individual farmers escaped to the towns throughout the Edo period, despite the fact that town visits were discouraged by their betters.

Why then was the Kabuki drama permitted at all? No doubt the theatre helped to reduce tensions. The shogunate may also have argued that merchants and townsmen already were so base that they were almost incapable of further corruption. By allowing them to watch, they at least did not engage in more serious forms of nuisance. Although the shogunate exhorted the samurai to stay away from the theatres for moralistic reasons, it was impossible to keep them away. On one occasion, the shogunate searched the audience upon leaving after a performance. Some samurai were apprehended, but the others in the audience, upon realising what was going on, either escaped disguised as women or servants or merely refused to leave the theatre until after the watch was recalled, several weeks later. Any incident of disorderly conduct in a theatre, something not uncommon, was dealt with severely and immediately by the shogunate authorities. Usually all theatres in the city were closed down for some months, and maybe a few actors and managers were sent into exile. Numerous bans and regulations also served to protect the theatre visitors from themselves. For instance, drinking in the auditorium was once banned after a particularly serious incident.

Edo had at first four, and then three, live grand theatres (*ôshibai*). The Nakamura-za was founded already in 1624, when its first leader, a man known as Saruwaka Kanzaburô, moved to Edo. The theatre district was originally located to Nakabashi, where the first Nakamura-za was opened. This theatre was soon followed by the three other main troupes, the Ichimura-za, the Morita-za, and the Yamamura-za, the latter opening in 1644. The first theatres were makeshift constructions, frequently torn down and rebuilt. Alternate theatres (*hikae yagura*, 'alternate towers') were used when a theatre manager of one of the theatres could not use his regular one. The authorities generally kept the theatres close together, to easier control the loose and dissolute behaviour of their inmates. However, sometimes the troupes had to relocate to other sites in the city. After eight years in Nakabashi, the theatres were removed to Ningyô-chô between Nihonbashi and the Sumida River. After the 1657 fire, they were again removed, the Nakamura-za to be located in Sakai-chô, the Ichimura-za in Fukiya-chô (both in Ningyô-chô). From 1672, the Yamamura-za and, somewhat later, the Morita-za were removed to Kobiki-chô ('Sawyer Town'), not far from Tsukiji.

In 1714, an illicit affair was exposed between Ejima (1681–1741), a lady-in-waiting in the domestic quarters of the shogunal household at Edo Castle, and Ikushima Shingorô (1671–1743), a popular actor in the Yamamura-za. Both were exiled, and the Yamamura-za was permanently closed by the authorities. Restrictions were also tightened on the three other theatres, all of whom were temporarily closed. More than 1,000 people were punished in various ways. At least three other members of the theatre (actors and managers) were also exiled. Ejima's brother was condemned to death. He probably had nothing to do with the affair, but a family was held responsible for its members. The two main characters, however, escaped relatively easy. Ejima was, after all, the shôgun's favourite.

The three remaining theatres in Edo, the Nakamura-za, Ichimura-za, and Morita-za, were from 1842 relocated to Saruwaka-chô (near Asakusa; the district's present name is Naniwa-chô), the new name of their neighbourhood derived from either a seventeenth-century style of comic entertainment, the founder of the first Edo theatre, or both.

The first performance of the season generally took place in the Eleventh Month. Since the Kanbun period (1661–1673), the event took place on any suitable day counted from the first day of the Eleventh Month to the tenth day of the Twelfth Month. On that day, the three large theatres each gave an exceptional performance during which all actors appeared on the scene. This was known as 'showing the face' (*kaomise*) and also served to introduce newly contracted actors to the audience. These performances were festive events. On the opening day, each theatre allowed free admission. The night before the opening day, fans staged wild festivals near the theatres. During performances by famous actors, fans assumed bizarre dress and lined up to celebrate their hero. For the rest of the season, programmes changed every month, always depending upon the popularity of each piece. As Kabuki grew increasingly sophisticated, the annual cycle of performances became fixed. The First Month, the Third Month, and the Fifth Month saw the early spring plays. From the middle of the Sixth Month, the summer season saw plays performed by junior actors at reduced admission charges. Famous actors were then often on tours throughout the country, as farmers, unlike townsmen, regarded the time between planting and harvest as sufficiently relaxed to go see a play. Guest actors from Kyôto performed during the Ninth Month. When the visiting actors were due to return, farewell plays, also known as autumn plays, were performed.

New plays were always added to the programme, while some old favourites were permanently retained. About half the repertory was derived from the earlier puppet plays. Plays grew more sophisticated in the later years. A constant theme in most plays was the hero's conflicting loyalties to his lord, his parents, and his family, always in that order, and his personal emotions. The social system imposed by the shogunate was never overtly criticised, even though an occasional merchant hero might be allowed to triumph over a particularly depraved samurai. Such plays, however, were always regarded with some suspicion by the authorities. The social system was not to be trifled with, and penalties for crossing the line were severe.



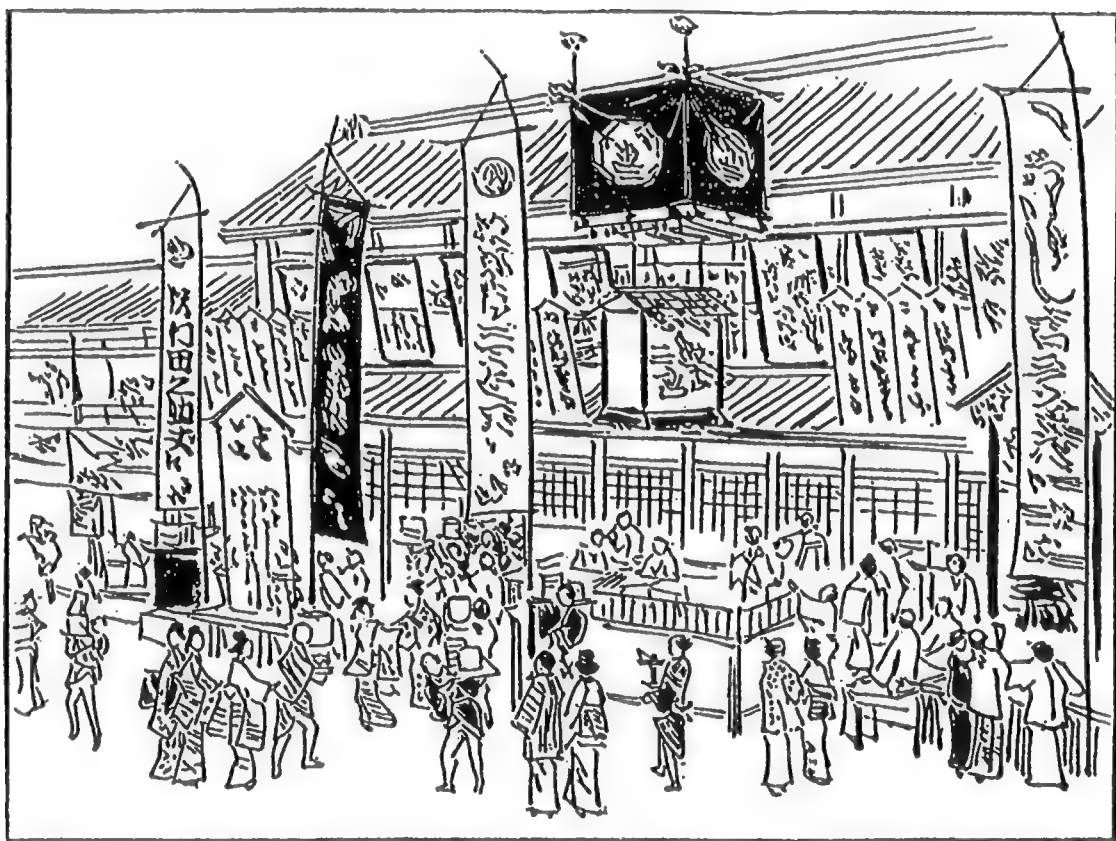


Fig. 24. Entrance to a licensed Kabuki theatre. The drum is here hung in a drum-cage.

Licensed Kabuki theatres were easy to recognise, as each had a tower (*yagura*) over the entrance, from which the staff beat a drum during the performances, numerous red lanterns, and large signs advertising famous actors and the current repertoire (Fig. 24). Only licensed theatres were allowed the tower and the drum. To get a ticket, the Edokko went to a tea house. In the same way as the tea houses that served Yoshiwara, numerous tea houses functioned as ticket agencies for the Kabuki theatres. These always monopolised the better seats. The tea houses also served as caterers, providing box lunches to the audience. The admission fee fluctuated widely and on a daily basis. Prices rose sharply when there were many spectators, and dropped equally fast when attendance figures fell. A lowest price of 12 copper *mon* has been mentioned, but this was in the early days when entrance was cheap. As star actors' salaries increased, the admission charges gradually rose and eventually few ordinary people could afford to attend one of the three licensed Kabuki theatres. The price of admission to the Ichimura-za in the Seventh Month of 1813 ranged from two *shu* for a seat in a compartment in the general pit (*hiradoma*), to one *bu* for a box seat (*sajiki*). Other locations included compartments in a raised portion of the pit (*takadoma*), side compartments (*rakandai*), and far boxes (*mukôsajiki*). As this was the summer season, the prices were actually lower than usual.

The seating in the theatre was on mats, divided into square compartments or boxes, each with room for about six people, sitting on cushions. The boxes



were separated by raised divisions like very low rails, along which members of the audience could reach their seats. The narrow footpaths between the compartments were also frequently used by food and drink sellers.<sup>9</sup>

Performances started early in the morning, often at dawn. The first pieces, however, were either formal introductory sets or first attempts by new and inexperienced actors. Few spectators bothered to show up until around seven, when the theatre really opened. Most of these had spent the previous night in a nearby restaurant, to show up early enough to get a good seat. This was definitely required when a popular actor was performing. Performances went on throughout the day. Dusk generally put an end to the performances, because light was insufficient. The programme therefore closed at the latest around half past seven in the evening. This meant that the true theatre addicts, especially those who had travelled some distance from home, often had to spend a second night too nearby.

The audiences were not very disciplined, and few if any actors expected to receive an attentive audience. The light in the theatres was also quite dim, as the only windows were in the roof. Natural light was thus quite insufficient, and the light from the inefficient candles did not help much. The actor even had to rely on a helper who carried a candle on the end of a bamboo to make his facial expression visible to the audience. This led to the development of a somewhat exaggerated style of acting, with large and expansive gestures, vivid make-up, and exaggerated costume, accompanied with wooden clappers and stamping dances whenever a moment of high emotion was to be emphasised. Another means to attract attention were the dramatic entrances and exits made through the auditorium along the specially built gangway known as the *hanamichi* ('flower-road'). Music was also used to attract attention, accompanying especially dance scenes. Kabuki music was capable of infinite variety. *Shamisen* was the most popular instrument. There were many *shamisen* styles, differing in repertoire and sound. The *shamisen* also came in different sizes. Singers practised many different vocal styles. Drums, flutes, and percussion instruments were popular, too.

Some people were commonly admitted free to the plays in exchange for cheering the actors loudly. These theatre-goers were known as 'cherry blossoms' (*sakura*), since they could watch the play without paying, just as the cherry blossoms could be enjoyed free of charge. Most of them, not unexpectedly, seem to have been connected to criminal gangs. Yet another device to attract the attention of the audience was the revolving stage (*mawaributai*) to enable a swift change of scenes. The revolving stage was first introduced by the Ōsaka playwright Namiki Shōzō (1730–73), who invented the device in 1758. This, together with many other devices for special effects, such as machinery that enabled an actor dressed as a ghost to appear or disappear in mystical and sudden ways, provided the means for actors to capture the attention of even the most jaded spectators.

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<sup>9</sup> Today such boxes remain only at the *sumō* stadiums, one of several examples of how old Edo traditions have lingered in *sumō*.

Fig. C15, facing page. A  
Kabuki actor playing a  
samurai with black tabi.

### The Kabuki Actor

The Kabuki actor was the paragon of male (and, for the male actors who specialised in female roles, often female) fashion. His life was public, and he set the trends followed by the trend-conscious Edokko. Most conspicuous were the leading actors' hair styles and clothing. Edo fashion was never subtle. Typical was the flamboyant and powerful *aragoto* ('rough style') or bravura style of acting originated and established in the late seventeenth century by the popular Kabuki star Ichikawa Danjûrô I (1660–1704), a style that soon became the most popular Kabuki style in Edo. Ichikawa Danjûrô, who was the progeny of a samurai family, donned a unique mask-like facial make-up (*kumadori*) with red and black paints, and exaggerated every movement on the stage. The Edokko copied the style as well as he could. Ichikawa Danjûrô, by the way, spent his life on the stage, and was eventually stabbed to death in his dressing room by another, envious Kabuki actor.

Although Kabuki began as a townsman's culture, and remained chiefly patronised by merchants, samurai also enjoyed the stage. Samurai were, of course, discouraged from going to the Kabuki theatres. Some went anyway, at times hiding their face beneath a deep, basket-like hat, of the same type they used to enter Yoshiwara incognito. Many, however, especially the great lords and the shôguns, summoned theatre companies or individual actors to perform in their private residences. Especially Nô troupes were frequently patronised. Some great lords even played Nô themselves, often playing the chief role in plays put on to entertain guests. From the end of the seventeenth century, it also grew common to invite Kabuki troupes. The actors and musicians were paid with money or clothing. If asked to travel to a distant residence, they received a travel allowance as well as an escort. As the special fees earned by the actors could be substantial, many actors looked forward to such invitations. Some famous Kabuki actors accordingly became quite wealthy.

The female-roles specialist (*onnagata*) Tamagawa Sennojô in the 1660s earned an annual salary of 200 *ryô* of gold. The most successful actors also acted as theatre managers, among them the famous Sakata Tôjûrô I (1647–1709), based in Kyôto and Ôsaka, who did so in the Genroku period (1688–1704). He could therefore cash in substantially on his own popularity and accordingly grew very rich. He reputedly had an annual salary of 600 *ryô*. A few years later, the famous female-roles specialist Yoshizawa Ayame I (1673–1729) became the first actor to earn 1,000 *ryô* in a year. Ichikawa Danjûrô I earned 500 *ryô* of gold a year by the end of the seventeenth century, and his successor Danjûrô II (1688–1758) earned up to 1,000 *ryô*. Ichikawa Danjûrô VII (1791–1859) earned 1,000 *ryô* a year during the 1820s (and was eventually banished because of his unseemly extravagance), and so did the female-roles specialist Iwai Hanshirô V (1776–1847). At the same time, Bandô Mitsugorô III (1775–1832) earned 1,300 *ryô* while Nakamura Utaemon III (1778–1838), with an origin in Ôsaka and Kyôto, earned no less than 1,400 *ryô*. Most actors, however, had to content themselves with working on a succession of annual season contracts, starting with the Eleventh Month of one year through the Tenth Month of the next. The salary was, of course, negotiable, and famous actors received more while the majority received less. Many an actor had to be content with little more than his daily rice.

美濃八郎  
中村芝翫



喜多川  
中村





Fig. C16. Inside one of the major Kabuki theatres. (Torii Kiyonaga, 1752–1815)







Fig. C17. The Akô rônin receiving an upsetting message in a Kabuki play. They wear chainmail under their garments and have tied up their sleeves in readiness for combat.





Fig. C18. Samurai ready for combat, an actor playing the Kabuki role of Ômi no Kotôta. (Utagawa Kunisada, 1786–1865)



Fig. C19. Young townsman wearing geta and carrying a sword, an actor playing a role in the Kabuki play *Kirare Yosa* ('Scarface Yosa'), based on a true story of crime, violence, and music. (Utagawa Kunisada, 1786–1865)





Fig. C20. The young samurai Ôboshi Rikiya, the son of Ôboshi Yuranosuke, and Yamana Jirôzaemon, both dressed in formal attire, in the 1748 play *Kanadehon Chûshingura*, based on the story of the 47 Akô rônin but with slightly changed names so as to avoid censorship. In reality, Ôboshi Rikiya was called Ôishi Chikara, while his father was Ôishi Kuranosuke. (Utagawa Toyokuni III, also known as Utagawa Kunisada, 1786–1865)

大星由良と助

## 尾上粟五郎

筑紫太宰府家傳身

御名残村言

未七月十五日

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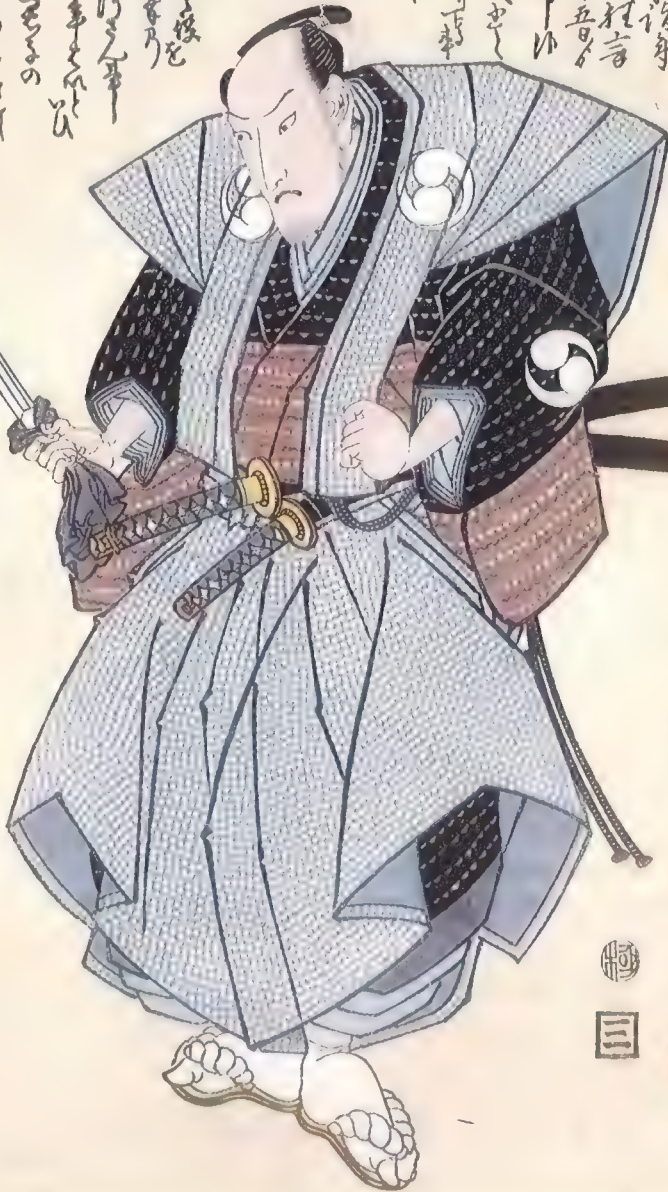


Fig. C21. Kabuki actor Onoue Kikugorô plays Ôboshi Yuranosuke, in formal attire.





Fig. C22. Samurai wearing geta, an actor playing the Kabuki role of Shirai Gonpachirô.  
(Utagawa Kunisada, 1786–1865)



The life of an actor was not easy. Although performances were usually never held in the evenings, they started early in the morning and continued throughout the day. Rehearsals were hasty, but nearly always some new piece was being prepared. Most runs were short, unless the success was outstanding. The actors had to conduct his business, have his meals, see visitors, and see to his publicity in intervals of appearing on the stage. The Kabuki actor did not, as a rule, have any life apart from the theatre. This was even more true for the *onnagata*, the female-roles specialist. Since 1629, women were not allowed to appear on a public stage. The *onnagata* was therefore a male actor who specialised in female roles. The *onnagata* had to spend his life as a transvestite to be fully accepted by critics and the public who expected him to live as a woman even outside the theatre. Male dress, male characteristics of any kind, and naturally any wife or children had to be kept out of the public view. The use of female actresses had been forbidden for moral reasons. This hardly helped, of course, as the gossip-prone Edokko soon found yet spicier scandals about the *onnagata* and their liaisons with rich, male patrons.

Many an actor began his profession simply by following in the footsteps of his father. The first appearance on stage might then be in a child's part. Others were adopted by a famous actor, to continue his line. Some, finally, became actors through the arduous profession of child entertainer. The great theatres were all in Edo, Kyôto, and Ôsaka, but there were also opportunities in the local theatres at pilgrimage centres such as Ise, Miyajima, and Kotohira. At these places, the theatres were usually set up in open spaces within Buddhist temples or Shintô shrines, as those locations were outside the jurisdiction of ordinary officials. The actors too were accommodated within the temple or shrine, as many towns prohibited the lodging of actors among ordinary travellers. Famous actors from the cities appeared on these stages, on circuit tours or on combined tours and pilgrimages of their own. Many of these temples and shrines still retain votive pictures or stone fence posts inscribed with the names of the actors who donated them.

### The Puppet Drama

In Edo period Japan, the puppet drama was known as *ayatsuri-jôruri* ('puppetry-chant') or *ningyô-jôruri* ('doll-chant'). Several styles existed, most of them originating in western Japan, around Ôsaka. Puppetry existed in Japan at least as early as the eleventh century. The puppets were shown to the audience above a curtain, which hid the puppet operators. Most or all puppet plays were performed by itinerant puppeteers.

In the sixteenth century, a particular style of chant (*jôruri*) evolved. This style soon became closely associated with the puppet drama. The name derived from the popular Tale of the Lady Jôruri (*Jôruri-hime monogatari*). Around the same time, the *shamisen* became the mainstay of the musical accompaniment to first the *jôruri* and, sometime after 1600, also the puppet play. The three traditions fused into the modern puppet drama, which combines puppetry, chant, and music.

By the mid seventeenth century, the puppet theatre flourished in Ôsaka and Kyôto. Edo too had two puppet theatres. However, the popularity of



Fig. 25. The monkey show  
(*sarumawashi*).

the new permanent Kabuki theatres, built in the 1650s, soon caused the puppet drama to almost disappear in Edo. In western Japan, the puppet drama achieved more lasting success. The popularity was mainly due to the *jôruri*-chanter Takemoto Gidayû (1651–1714) and the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), who together laid the foundation for the modern Japanese puppet drama. Takemoto opened a theatre in 1685 in which he chanted the pieces written by Chikamatsu. The tradition in which the puppeteer operates the puppet in full view of the audience was introduced in their time. Most other innovations in the Japanese puppet drama, such as legs for male dolls, rolling eyes, and grasping hands, came only in the 1720s and 1730s. By 1734, each puppet was manipulated by three men. The puppets reached their final and present form by 1750.

Ironically, this was also the time from which the puppet drama went into decline. In Edo, the puppet drama was long superseded by the Kabuki. Even in Ôsaka and Kyôto, the puppet drama declined in importance after the mid eighteenth century. In modern Japan, the puppet drama is generally known as Bunraku. This term is of more recent origin, as the only puppet theatre that survived in modern Japan was the Bunraku-za, established in Ôsaka in the early nineteenth century.

### Monkey Shows, Variety Theatres, and Street Entertainment

Although the Kabuki actors and the chanters, manipulators, and the musicians of the puppet theatres were the leading entertainers of Japan, they were by no means the only ones. Some, such as the male jesters who performed comic dances and sang comic songs at parties worked in restaurants and brothels. Others were itinerant entertainers. Some of these were almost on the same level as the lowest grades of actors. Other performed on the streets, as one-man performers. In Edo, street entertainers of various kinds were seen at nearly every corner.

Monkey shows (*sarumawashi*) at times formed popular entertainment in the streets of Edo. The custom had a deeper significance, however, as according to a Chinese belief imported to Japan, it was held that horses who saw performing monkeys remained in good health. It therefore became common for itinerant monkey trainers to visit and perform at the stables of samurai. As monkey shows eventually came to be regarded as generally auspicious and not only to horses, performances became increasingly common (Fig. 25).

From 1791, the first permanent variety theatre (*yose*) opened in Edo. The variety theatre became very popular as a form of cheap entertainment; it was said that the ordinary townsman would rest either in the public bath or at the

*yose*. By 1842, Edo counted 200 *yose*. Between 1854 and 1860, there were as many as 392. Each *yose* accommodated about 100 spectators, and the entrance fee was only 36 copper *mon*. The leading performers were said to have refused to perform if the spectators numbered more than about 100, as they then lost their touch with the audience. The *yose* provided cheap entertainment. The average admission fee to a Kabuki performance was at least seven or eight times that of admission to a *yose*, and presumably more as the tea houses wanted their share of the patron's money. Even the cheapest possible Kabuki performance still cost twice the average fee of a *yose*. Attendance at a *yose* generally was four to five times higher than at the Kabuki theatre. Moreover, the *yose* remained open during the evening, when almost all other types of public performances including the Kabuki theatres had closed.

The term *yose* is in fact an abbreviation of a word signifying 'a place that brings in the crowds.' It was the site for mainly comic storytelling (*rakugo*) but also for other performances, such as dramatic narration of historical episodes (*kôdan*), conjuring (*kijutsu*), and *rôkyoku*, the recital of ancient, often martial ballads known as *naniwabushi* or, a name formerly more common, *chongarebôzu*. It was said to be a *yose* in every neighbourhood, although this was slightly exaggerated. In sumptuary edicts issued between 1841 and 1843, all except 15 were temporarily closed down, and the few remaining ones were strictly admonished to offer only serious and edifying entertainment.

Other types of theatres also existed. The shrine theatres (*miyaji shibai*) could get away with numerous shows that were forbidden elsewhere, as they were under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Temples and Shrines instead of the Town Magistrate. Other performances, of an unlicensed and temporary nature, were known as 'hundred-day stages' (*hyakunichi shibai*). These featured whatever was forbidden in the licensed theatres, for instance women actors.

The small, unlicensed theatres (*koshibai*) were forbidden many characteristics of the grand, licensed Kabuki theatres. They were, for instance, not allowed the drum tower, raised entryways (*hanamichi*), revolving stages, and draw curtains. For the latter reason, they had to rely on the simple drop-curtain (*donchô*) pulled up and down on a roller. They were therefore also known as drop-curtain stages (*donchô shibai*). They were indeed only permitted to spread coarse straw matting on the floor. Regardless of the skill of the actor who performed on such a stage, he was semi-officially 'classified' as a drop-curtain actor (*donchô yakusha*) and was forbidden to perform in a licensed theatre.

The streets also saw numerous types of entertainment without any pretence of seriousness. Among these were conjurers, dancers, singers, puppet men, sword swallows, and exhibitors of fat women or various rare animals such as peacocks. Others displayed imported telescopes and invited the passers-by to have a look, for a price of four copper *mon*. Jippensha Ikku reported in the 1800s. Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British minister to Japan, wrote in 1863 that:

storytellers collect a little audience. A few noisy beggars generally take up their position by the wayside ... Here a party of jugglers may often be seen too, collecting a crowd from the passers-by ... the Japanese performers not only swallow portentously long swords, and poise themselves on bottles; but out of their mouths come the most unimaginable things ... flying horses, swarms of flies, ribbons by the mile, and paper shavings without end ... we pass through a long line of booths, where a sort of daily bazaar is held for the sale of gaudily-coloured prints, maps (many of them copies of European charts), story books, swords, tobacco pouches, and pipes, for the humbler classes; and in the midst of which a fortune teller may habitually be seen ... On festive occasions, a row of dingy booths divided by curtains into small compartments is often seen, [prostitution] provided for the lowest class.<sup>10</sup>

Street artists who performed magic were common and generally attracted wide interest. Conjuring originally derived together with so many other arts from China. In Japan, 'sleight-of-hand' (*tejina*) became increasingly popular in the early Edo period. Other professional conjurers performed magical tricks that relied on mechanical devices (*karakuri*). Among the tricks performed may be mentioned illusions in which paper butterflies turned alive through the use of a fan, or in which the conjurer appeared to swallow an entire horse, something Sir Rutherford Alcock apparently saw. Laurence Oliphant witnessed the butterfly trick. The artificial butterflies:

were made in the simplest manner. A sheet of paper torn into slips supplied all the materials, By tearing these again into small oblong pieces, and twisting them in the centre, they were made roughly to represent the body and two wings. Two of these impromptu butterflies were then puffed into the air, and kept in suspense there by the action of the fan beneath them. This required to be most carefully and scientifically applied, so as not only to prevent their separating, but to guide their motions in any required direction. Now they would flutter aloft as though chasing each other in playful dalliance, at one moment twine together, at another so far apart that it seemed a mystery how the same fan could act upon both. Then they would settle together upon the leaf of a neighbouring shrub, or, more curious still, alight gently on the edge of the fan itself.<sup>11</sup>

Other conjurers performed escape feats such as extricating themselves from closed caldrons and trunks. Yet others changed bamboo leaves into fish, breathed air into a sheet of white paper to turn it into an egg, produced an unending flow of water from a bottle, and manifold other similar tricks, many of which are in common use also today. From the late seventeenth century, the prolific publishing industry of Edo also saw the profit in the printing of instruction manuals in popular conjuring. This only increased the prevalence and popularity of street conjurers.

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10 Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan*. 2 vols (London: Longman, 1863. Reprinted in 1969 by Greenwood Press, New York), Vol. 1, pp.111–13.

11 Oliphant, *Narrative*, pp.2, 224.

Edo saw street-corner men and women of all kinds. Some were semi-religious bell-ringers, chest-beaters, and quasi-religious lunatics who 'performed' for donations. Many were hardly better off than beggars, of which there were also many (see below). Others included one-man street theatre performers. Such an actor made up his right side into one character and the left side into another. By changing the side displayed to the spectators as well as the tone of his voice, he could play two roles at the same time. Yet other street entertainers had sophisticated Jack-in-the-boxes (*odedeko*). Sophisticated, because of the mechanism of the box, which each time the box was opened caused a different puppet to spring out. The Edokko therefore did not grow tired of the performance, even when repeated several times.

In the open spaces and broad streets originally established as fire-breaks, semi-permanent booths were set up. In these booths, passers-by paid to see various attractions such as monsters, mermaids, people with interesting deformities, and also strange beasts and birds, often imported by the Dutch from foreign, exotic lands. The open places were laconically – and truthfully – known as 'popular spots' (*sakariba*). Laurence Oliphant described one show at Asakusa in 1858:

Immediately on entering, a gorgeously decorated junk, almost the size of nature, gaily freighted with a pleasure-party, was sailing over an ocean so violently agitated that only one result could be anticipated in real life: but the junk was merely a sort of scene to conceal the exhibition behind it. This consisted of a series of groups of figures carved in wood the size of life, and as cleverly coloured as Madame Tussaud's wax-works. No. 1 was a group of old men, in which decrepitude and senility of countenance were admirably portrayed. No. 2, a group of young Japanese Hebes dressing, and a country clodhopper rooted to the spot in ecstasy at the contemplation of their charms. The humour of this tableau consisted in an appearance of unconsciousness on the part of the ladies. No. 3 was a princess in magnificent array, seated on a dais, watching her maids of honour going through divers gymnastic performances: one of them was in a position more agile than graceful, her occupation being, while extended on her back, to keep a ball dancing in the air on the soles of her feet. The attitudes, which were extremely difficult to represent correctly in wood-carving, were executed with wonderful spirit and truth to nature. No. 4 was a group of men quarrelling over sakee,<sup>12</sup> the fragments of the cups, dashed to pieces in their anger, lay strewn about. Upon the countenances of two of the men the expression of ungovernable rage was well depicted. The other was leaning back and laughing immoderately. No. 5 was a group of women bathing in the sea; one of them had been caught in the folds of a cuttle-fish, the others, in alarm, were escaping, leaving their companion to her fate. The cuttle-fish was represented on a huge scale, its eyes, eyelids, and mouth being made to move simultaneously by a man inside the head.<sup>13</sup>

Another popular attraction, still found in most or all Japanese fairs, was to draw strings for prizes. The manager held a bundle of a large number

<sup>12</sup> Oliphant means sake.

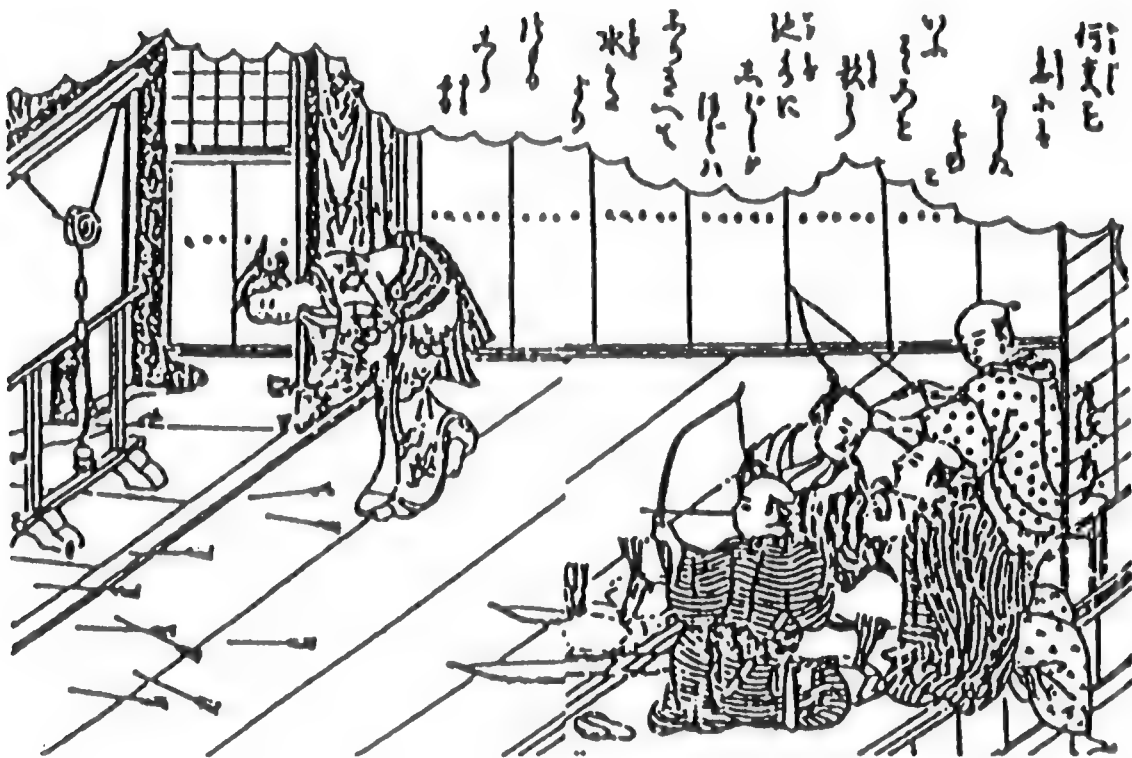
<sup>13</sup> Oliphant, *Narrative 2*, pp.215–16.



Fig. 27, right. The booth of a story-teller, in this case a reader of the fourteenth-century war tale *Taiheiki* ('Chronicle of Great Peace').



Fig. 26, below. Having fun at the archery gallery with miniature bows.



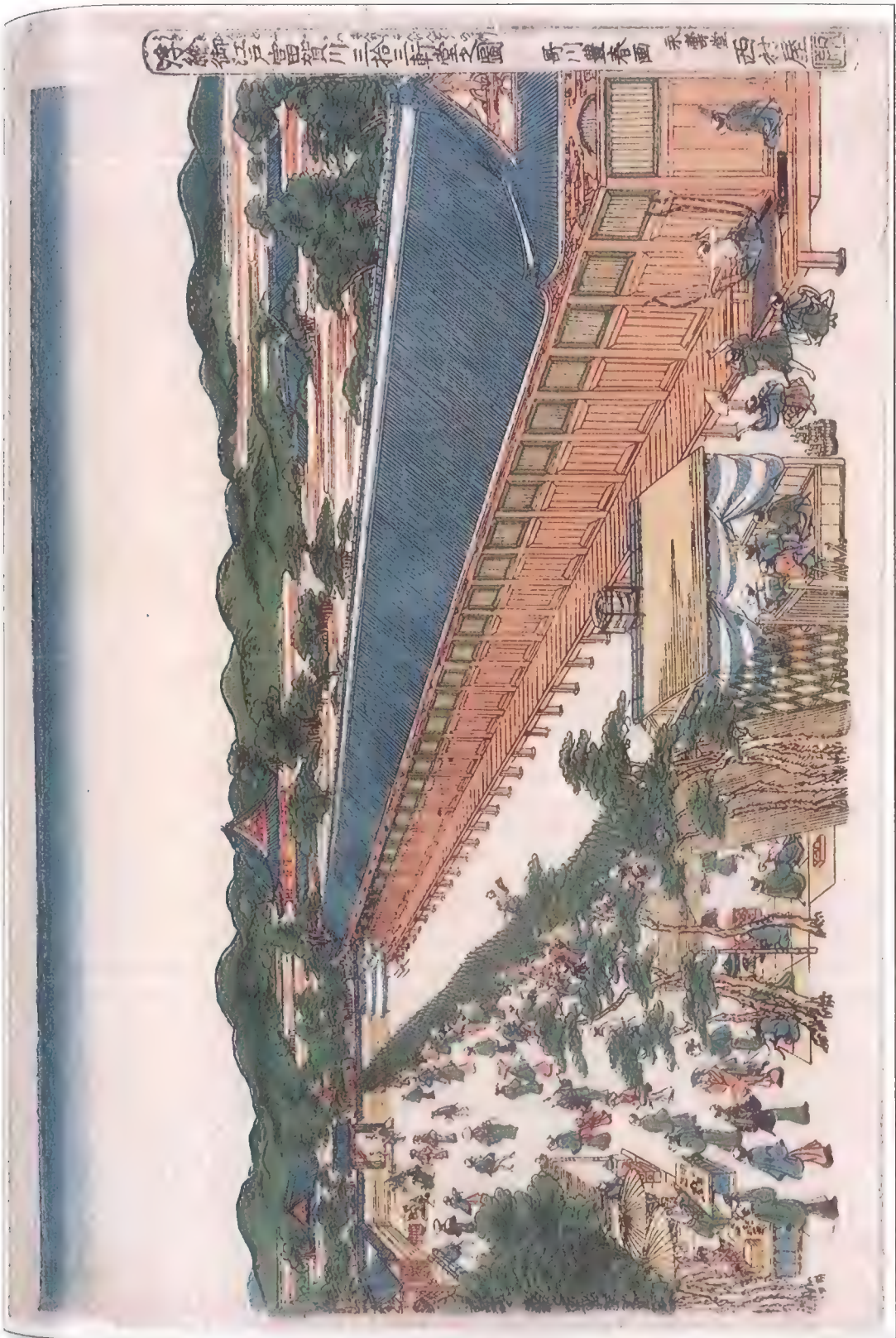


Fig. C23. The Sanjūsangendō in Fukagawa, a building for archery practice, copied from the similarly named Sanjūsangendō temple in Kyōto. (Utagawa Toyoharu, 1735–1814)

of strings, many or perhaps each one attached to a certain prize, and the participants paid a fee to pull out one of the strings, receiving the prize. It was of course impossible to know which prize one would win. This game, originally said to have been a traditional spring pastime, was especially popular among women and children. 'On into the night they played,' Saikaku wrote, 'completely absorbed in the game.'<sup>14</sup>

Other attractions included archery galleries, which offered prizes for those skilful or lucky with the small bow (Fig. 26). There were many of these at Asakusa. The attendants were all female, and all had back rooms where the women provided other services to those whose notion of 'shooting' did not involve the use of bow and arrows. After the end of the Edo period, they were still there. 'At the north end are ranged the archery galleries, also presided over by pretty black-eyed Dianas, in paint, powder, and shining coiffure. They bring you tea, smile, talk nonsense, and giggle; smoke their long pipes with tiny bowls full of mild, fine-cut tobacco; puff out the long white whiffs from their flat-bridged noses; wipe the brass mouthpiece, and offer it to you; and then ask you leading and very personal questions without blushing ... Full grown, able-bodied men are the chief patrons of these places of pleasure.'<sup>15</sup> The archery attendants belonged to those women who were forbidden to practice by the sumptuary edicts issued between 1841 and 1843. As the citation indicates, the effects of the edicts did not last for long.

Storytellers were also a common sight on the streets. Storytelling (*rakugo*), a form of comic monologue, was a very popular performing art. The most important part of the storyteller's performance was his final line, the punch line or *ochi* ('drop'). This final line accordingly gave the name to the genre. The word *rakugo* is written with two characters, the first meaning 'drop' (*raku*, also pronounced *ochi*) and the second meaning 'word' (*go*). The storyteller (*rakugoka*) set up his booth in the street (Fig. 27). He used few implements, only a folding fan, a hand towel, and maybe a block of wood which he banged on the desk to punctuate his narrative. As individual, often itinerant storytellers were more difficult to control than permanent theatres, the repertory included many stories of clever or brave townsmen who fooled stupid or wicked samurai. Nominally, no fee was required; however, the storyteller at times opened his fan and with it indicated to the audience that it was time to pay. Gifts were traditionally delivered on a fan, and receiving gifts was exactly what he had in mind.

*Rakugo* was not the only kind of storytelling performance. Several other types existed, and it is only in recent years the performers, typically, attempt to follow a particular tradition or school of storytelling. In fact, the various kinds of storytelling often merged, only to be later separated again by other performers. Among the other early ones were *naniwabushi*, also known as *rôkyoku*. This was a narrative ballad rhythmically chanted by a solo narrator accompanied by a single *shamisen* player. Historical and traditional tales formed the main part of the repertory. Although of old and uncertain origin,

<sup>14</sup> Saikaku, *Five Women*, p.112.

<sup>15</sup> William Elliot Griffis, *The Mikado's Empire* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876), p.388.

*naniwabushi* at first developed in the Edo period. It was always most popular in Ōsaka and Kyōto rather than in Edo but as street entertainment, it could be seen anywhere. Another variant of the narrative chant accompanied with music was *gidayūbushi* recitation. This form of recitation was made popular from at least the early 1700s by the puppet theatre manager and chanter Takemoto Gidayū, from whom the art also received its name. Yet another variant was *sandaibanashi*, in which the audience offered three themes for the performer to combine into a humorous story.

*Rakugo* and the other types of storytelling emerged as roadside shows and on makeshift stages set up in restaurants and during banquets. With time, however, storytelling in its various forms became most popular as part of the entertainment offered by the variety theatre. Top performers were said to earn as much as between seven and eight *ryō* per day. More typical but still very successful artists such as Kawashima Kayū in the first third of the nineteenth century charged 48 *mon* per person for a show at his personal home, with an audience of up to 150 people; one *ryō* per day for performing elsewhere; and eventually 100 *mon* per person after he had built his own playhouse.

The Edokko had a true passion for whatever was odd and strange. The Dutchman Overmeer Fisscher retold a story of a Japanese fisherman who somehow contrived to join the upper half of a monkey to the lower half of a fish. He then claimed to have caught the creature – a mermaid – alive in his net, but that it had died shortly after being taken out of the water. He made huge profits by displaying the creature to credulous onlookers. Moreover, he asserted that the creature had spoken during the few minutes it had remained alive. Not only had the creature spoken, it had also predicted a certain number of years of wonderful fertility, followed by a fatal epidemic, the only remedy against which would be the possession of the likeness of the creature itself. This naturally led to an immense sale of pictures of the mermaid, which brought great riches to everybody involved in the scam. It should be mentioned that the Japanese were not the only ones to be taken in by this clever device. Either the very same composite animal, or a similarly contrived one, was sold to the Dutch factory and transmitted to Batavia. There the creature fell into the hands of an American, who in the years 1822–3 exhibited it in Europe, naturally as a real mermaid. The Japanese fisherman's clever contraption thus served to fill the pockets of numerous shrewd businessmen on different continents.

Other kinds of street entertainment were dog fighting, cock fights (*tori awase*), and bull fighting, the latter a rural sport in several locations of Japan although not necessarily in Edo. Bull was pitted against bull, a match ending when one bull was driven to its knees or turned and ran.

Many temples organised exhibitions of their ancient treasures (*kaichō*). Such displays of ordinarily hidden or secret treasures were a common means to raise funds. Most common was to display them in the temple itself, but many provincial temples also brought their treasures in road shows to display them in Edo or Kyōto. Temple paintings were most commonly displayed, and explanations were provided by monks or priests. There were also many laymen and nuns who travelled throughout the country for the same purpose, displaying and explaining religious paintings in exchange for alms.



Yet another source of street entertainment was at times provided by rowdy samurai, especially if they got gloriously drunk, argued among each other, and drew their swords.

### *Sumô*

Japanese belt wrestling, *sumô* (Fig. 28), is an ancient sport whose origin goes back to a distant past. Similar types of belt wrestling were, and sometimes still are, popular all over northern Eurasia, including Korea, Mongolia, Russia, Scandinavia, and other countries. In Japan, *sumô* became a professional sport in the early Edo period.

In *sumô*, two men dressed in elaborate loincloths or belts (*mawashi*) fight in a small ring to see who can force the other out of the ring or throw him to the ground. In the seventeenth century, the ring was a square area delineated by four square columns with rope strung between them, and (later as well as nowadays) bounded by long and thin straw sacking filled with earth and small stones. The ring remained square for a long time, although it at present is round. In most cases, the wrestlers attempt to get a firm hold on the opponent's belt, which gives them the leverage to throw, trip, or lift the opponent. *Sumô* wrestling bouts are preceded by much ritual, but the actual wrestling is most often short and sharp. Winners are judged by a referee, often a former wrestler, and receive prizes.

Originally, the sport was performed at shrines and later also temples as part of religious festivals (Fig. 29). In Edo, the first public wrestling matches were said to have been held in 1623, by one Akashi Shiganosuke. He is today considered to have been the first *yokozuna*, or *sumô* wrestler of the highest rank. Later, bouts of *sumô* wrestling were organised in which the spectators paid for admission, to aid the rebuilding funds of the religious establishments where the bouts were held. This was known as 'benefit *sumô*' (*kanjinsumô*). The first such tournament was held by the priests of Kofukuji in Yamashiro in 1644. In Edo, the first 'benefit *sumô*' wrestling bout was held in 1660, and such tournaments became especially popular from the eighteenth century. Some were also held to collect funds for the construction of bridges.

Eventually, some *sumô* bouts developed into professional tournaments, in which the admission fees paid by the audience went to defray the cost of the presentation and to pay the wrestlers. In Edo, one major tournament was held during the Eleventh Month. For over 100 years, the Hachiman shrine in Fukagawa was the chief location for Edo *sumô* tournaments. The tournaments moved to nearby Ryôgoku in 1791, where they still remain, after a brief spell on the other side of the Sumida River. Religious tournaments with free admission still take place, however, for instance at the Yasukuni shrine in Tôkyô.

Quite early, ranking lists were introduced to distinguish among the various *sumô* wrestlers. Promotion or demotion in the ranking lists depended on the wrestler's overall performance in the tournaments. Even in ancient times, *sumô* wrestlers were divided in a series of ranks, and those ranks were in the Edo period, as well as today, used to indicate position in the ranking lists.

*Sumô* meetings gave the impression of theatres in that a tower was raised at the entrance, from which a drum was played from dawn until about eight in the morning to announce that there would be wrestling. The drum was



Fig. 28. Belt wrestling (*sumô*). Behind the wrestlers, a referee with his characteristic, rigid fan.



also played during the fights. In the Edo period, the existence of this tower indicated that the meeting had official approval. Tickets were, and are, sold by special tea houses (*sumôjaya*). The seating inside was also similar to a theatre, in boxes in which the spectators sat down on cushions. From about 1780, *sumô* meetings were scheduled to last for 10 wrestling days. Since they were not held under cover, however, rain would bring the bouts to a temporary halt. The actual meetings could therefore last longer, sometimes for as long as a month.

*Sumô* wrestlers were big men, and their popularity grew as great as their bulk (Fig. 30). Wrestlers had avid fans, both among men and women, commoners as well as great lords. The shōgun himself was frequently a fan. Women were generally not admitted to the *sumô* tournaments, except in the last years of the Edo period and then only on the final day of the tournament. This exclusion was originally for religious reasons, because of the need for ritual purity in what to all purposes was a religious act. The shrine could simply not take the risk that menstruating women attended, as this would defile the proceedings.

The Edo Hanjōki gives a vivid picture of a *sumô* tournament:

From daybreak till eight in the morning a drum is beaten to announce that there will be wrestling. The spectators rise early for the sight. The adversaries having been settled, the wrestlers enter the ring from the east and from the west. Tall stalwart

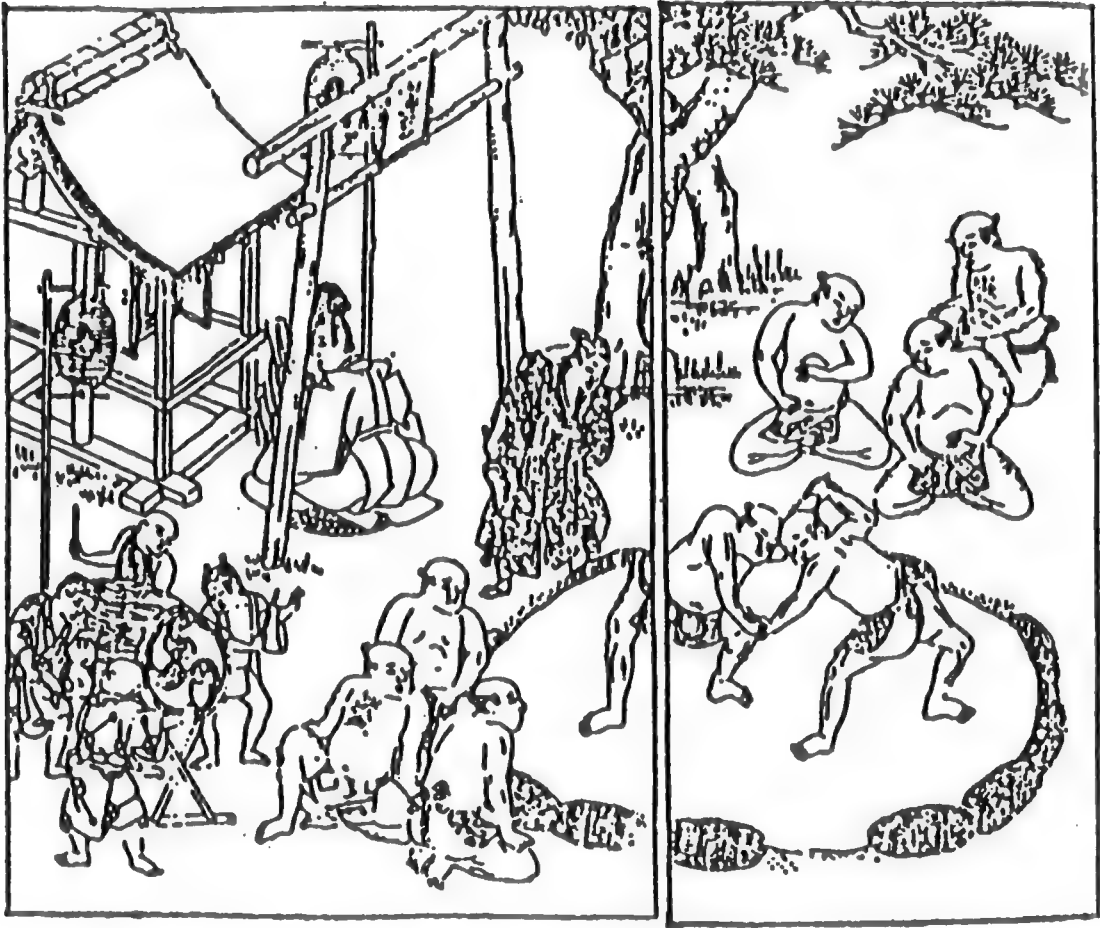


Fig. 29. Sumô performed at a shrine.

men are they, with sinews and bones of iron. Like the gods Niô,<sup>16</sup> they stand with their arms akimbo, and, facing one another, they crouch in their strength. The umpire watches until the two men draw their breath at the same time, and with his fan gives the signal. They jump up and close with one another, like tigers springing on their prey, or dragons playing with a ball. Each is bent on throwing the other by twisting or by lifting him. It is no mere trial of brute strength; it is a tussle of skill against skill. Each of the forty-eight throws is tried in turn. From left to right, and from right to left, the umpire hovers about, watching for the victory to declare itself. Some of the spectators back the east, others back the west. The patrons of the ring are so excited that they feel the strength tingling within them; they clench their fists, and watch their men, without so much as blinking their eyes. At last one man, east or west, gains the advantage, and the umpire lifts his fan in token of victory. The plaudits of the bystanders shake the neighbourhood, and they throw

<sup>16</sup> Always appearing in pairs as statues of powerful deities, flanking and guarding the entrance to a temple.



Fig. 30. *Sumô* wrestlers, mid nineteenth century. (Photo: Felice Beato)

their clothes or valuables into the ring, to be redeemed afterwards in money; nay, in his excitement, a man will even tear off his neighbour's jacket and throw it in.<sup>17</sup>

From the time when *sumô* became popular in the Edo period, the *sumô* wrestlers wore the type of coloured thickly woven silk loincloth also used today. The hairstyle – a topknot – was of the type regarded as ordinary in Edo; unlike the rest of Japanese society, the *sumô* wrestler's topknot remains the same today.

## Gambling

### Gambling and Crime

Gambling was rampant in Edo, indeed so rampant that gambling was usually prohibited by law. At first, gambling was an individual pastime or merely another means for some street entertainers to raise cash. From the end of the eighteenth century, however, Edo gambling took on a new guise. Professional gamblers (*bakuchiuchi* or *bakuto*, the latter term criminal slang formed from the word *tobaku*, gambling, by reversing the syllables) provided gambling houses (*tekkaba*), for which they extracted a service fee from each player.

<sup>17</sup> Translation from Mitford, *Tales*, pp.172–4.

Fig. 31. A girl and a young man playing the dice game *sugoroku*.



Gambling has since remained connected with organised crime.

Dice games, for instance a kind of backgammon introduced from China in the seventh century known as *sugoroku* (Fig. 31) seem to have been among the most popular gambling games in Edo. Simpler forms of gambling, such as coin-tossing games, were also firm favourites. Other games were more sophisticated, for instance card games. Public lotteries, too, were held during the Edo period. These were, unlike gambling, legal.

### Card Games

The Japanese word for card games (*karuta*) was derived from the Portuguese word *carta* ('card'), introduced in the sixteenth century, and this is generally taken to prove that the first card games in Japan were introduced by the Portuguese. This may well be correct, as the earliest known Portuguese-



Fig. 32. Young women playing the card game *uta-karuta* ('poem cards').

style card games are *tenshō karuta* (so named because of its introduction in the Tenshō period of 1573–91) and *unsun karuta* (from old Portuguese *um*, 'one', and *sumo*, 'higher'). However, the earliest known card games in the world were played in China. There card games were known at least since the ninth century, and woodblock-printed cards were used by the eleventh century. Chinese cards were much smaller than the Portuguese (European) variety, about five centimetres long and two and a half wide. Early Japanese cards appear to be larger, but cards following the Chinese sizes were also common. Although the popular card games no doubt were introduced by the Portuguese, a Chinese influence cannot be completely ruled out.

One popular card game was *hanafuda* (also known as *hana karuta*, 'flower cards'). This card game was derived both from the already mentioned



*tenshō karuta* and also from the ancient court game known as *kachō awase* ('matching birds and flowers'). In *hanafuda*, 48 cards are used, each one with a particular flower representing one of the 12 months of the year. The cards are divided into 12 four-card suits. The rules are complex. The cards have assigned point values, and the object of the game is to collect as many cards as possible by matching suits. Another gambling card game was known as 'three-cards' (*sanmai karuta*). The game is similar to blackjack or 21, but the goal is to reach but not exceed 19. New card games were also developed during the Edo period: *uta karuta* ('poem cards') and *iroha karuta* ('ABC cards'), both nowadays generally played during the New Year festivities.

*Uta karuta* was developed in the early Edo period from a traditional game of matching halves of decorated, painted clamshells (*kai awase*). Two sets of 100 cards were used. Each card of one set had the entire text of a famous 31-syllable, five-line *waka* poem, while each card in the other set had only the last two lines. One participant in the game, the reader, reads the first three lines of a poem from the first set of cards. The players attempt to pick out and seize the matching card with the concluding lines from all the cards of the second set, spread out in front of them (Fig. 32). To win, one needs speed and good memory. The poems were usually from the famous thirteenth-century anthology known as *Hyakunin isshu* ('Single Poems by a Hundred Poets').

*Iroha karuta* was not strictly speaking an Edo game, as it was invented in Kyôto around 1850. It is still very popular around the New Year. The game consists of two sets of 48 cards. The first set, the *yomifuda* or 'reading cards', is printed with 48 verses and proverbs, each beginning with a different character of the 47 Japanese phonetic syllabary (*kana*) with the addition of the Chinese character *kyô*. The second set, the *efuda* ('picture cards'), has pictures representing the verses and proverbs and also the *kana* in question. A reader reads out the proverbs, while the players try to find the matching picture card among the *efuda* cards spread out in front of them.

### Go and Shôgi

*Go*, or *Igo*, was introduced from China, where it was very popular, especially among the literati. The game is played with 180 white and 181 round black stones (Fig. 33). The two players take turns placing black and white stones, respectively, on a board marked off into 19 lines by 19 lines. The stones are placed on any of the 361 points of intersection (*me*) of the lines, and the object is to capture as much territory as possible. The opponent's stones can be captured and removed from the board, but the amount of occupied territory is determined by counting the total number of intersections enclosed by a player's stones. The game is ultimately a game of territory, not elimination of enemy stones. *Go* was considered a masculine game, not really suitable for women.

*Shôgi*, sometimes known as Japanese chess, was also introduced from China. The game is similar to chess in the ways the pieces move and in the objective which is to checkmate the opponent's king (Fig. 34). However, a captured piece can be used again as one's own piece, and most pieces can be promoted in status and thus become more powerful.

Fig. 33, below. Samurai smoking and pondering the strategy of a Go game.

Fig. 34, right. A woman playing shōgi (chess).





陽明とや磐のぬきる秋の心件六

由留木 素女

丹波の領主由留木素女文武

道に疎うゑと天性

園基と好あよりて

一族さる笹山檢校盲

人あつても妙多と聞招く

園盤石の連々たる黒白も大領賢者と慢る衡頂を

約る笹山やあさしと緯て断點を跨りる劫而征と撥合結る

盲人の關親絶一妙手を刺し眼法師が羸石の終め輪一の

勝負の論時の怒ふ山嶺の怨魂の姿を顯る宝庫の堀越今下度の

手合をい亀やと座頭の壁訴訟は是龜山の怪物はあり一往還と惣太

誠忠の諫を容一統領を念も解く大原宮の末社に崇一法師が

靈碑彼神の前の龜石も今い蚕飼の

護神と國の口碑に傳ふとなん

應需 瀬川如皐記

上巻  
下巻  
三刀

## Literacy, Publishing and Cartoons

### Literacy, Reading, and Writing

Not only the characters but the entire art of writing had in ancient times been imported from China. Until the beginning of the Edo period, literacy was very much a minority accomplishment. During the Edo period, however, literacy increased rapidly throughout the population. The aforementioned scholar Arai Hakuseki, a former masterless samurai who rose to a high position in the government, pointed out that of the samurai he had known since his childhood, hardly one in 10 had sufficient knowledge of writing and arithmetic for even modest duties in the public service. When Arai reached mature years, however, almost all samurai even of the lowest rank had the necessary education.

Commoners, too, rapidly acquired literacy. By the end of the Edo period, general literacy presumably approached 40 percent of the total population. According to a mid eighteenth century text, *Kanpô-Enkyô Kôfufûzokushi* ('A guide to the customs of Edo during the 1740s'), 'By 1750, just about anyone could become an elementary writing teacher. Tuition has become extremely inexpensive, and school-registration procedures were simplified. It amounts to a bargain sale on education, and as a result, even people of low status have enrolled in *terakoya* (schools), to the point that nowadays 'brushless people' (*muhitsu* – those who cannot write) are a rarity. This is a very good thing.'<sup>18</sup> By 1870 – after the Edo period – 40–45 percent of boys and 15 percent of girls in Japan were literate. A higher percentage was presumably literate in the cities, judging from the many low-ranking servants who were avid readers of the cheap literature of Edo.

Why did Edo period Japan develop such a high rate of literacy? Unlike neighbouring China and Korea, Japan never had an intellectual elite. The warrior class dominated the country politically, but its members were considered first and foremost a military elite. A scholar could therefore emerge from almost any social class, and although scholarship was never a certain way to social improvement, the prospective scholar was at least not prevented from gaining an education. Furthermore, merchants, village officials, and lower town functionaries all had to develop skills in reading, writing, and the preparation of official documents.

To write, the Japanese used a brush of the Chinese model, of which numerous sizes were available (Fig. 35). The brush was made of animal hair set into a bamboo tube. Ink was compounded from lamp-black and glue, kneaded and worked into sticks. The ink stick was used with an ink stone of fine-grained slate or a similar material. The ink stone came with a flat surface and a sunken end where water was kept while writing. The making of ink and ink stones of high quality demanded a great deal of skill and experience. When writing, the ink stick first had to be dipped in water. Ink was then produced by rubbing the wet ink stick on the flat part of the stone, from where it was absorbed

Fig C24, facing page.  
Yurugi Motogen, having  
understood that his  
opponent cheated him  
in a game of Go. (*Eimei  
nijuhashuku*, by Tsukioka  
Hônen, 1839–1892)

<sup>18</sup> Translation from Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, p.120. The author is unknown. Original in *Kinsei fûzoku kenbunshû* ('Iôkyô: Kokusho Kankôkai, pp.1969–70), Vol. 3.



Fig. 35. Writing with the brush. Nearby, a brush stand and an ink-stone.

by the brush. The Japanese used several kinds of paper. One type was especially used for writing letters. When sent, the letter was enclosed in a different kind of paper. The envelope thus formed was closed with glue made of flour or rice or the letter was merely folded shut. Uneducated people generally signed a document by placing one's right thumb print on the document. Educated people who did not have the personal seal at hand did likewise. This custom, too, originated in China.

The Japanese language was not pronounced in the same way in the Edo period as today. The more common pronunciation 'Nipponbashi' instead of 'Nihonbashi' has already been mentioned. Another difference from today was the pronunciation of the vowels E and O, which especially in the early Edo period were always pronounced Ye and Wo. Contemporary Europeans at least early in the Edo period, for instance, invariably referred to Ōsaka as Vosaka and Edo as Yedo. Certain written words also seem to have changed their common reading. So is Mount Fuji in modern Japanese referred to as *Fujisan*, while the Edo period reading seems to have been *Fujiyama*. The Chinese reading *san* ('mountain', *shan* in contemporary Chinese) –

presumably regarded as more literate and accordingly more formal – has replaced the native Japanese word *yama* ('mountain'). The choice of character used when writing the name has of course not changed.

### Publishing

Despite the emphasis on sensual entertainment, Edo was a city of information and publishing. There were many types of books, many of which were illustrated. Most published materials were, expectedly, just as today aimed at the lowest tastes in society – if the term 'gutter press' had existed in Edo, it would have been an appropriate term. However, works of literary and scientific value were published from time to time.

Printing was normally from wooden blocks, one block to a page. Each block was carved from a handwritten original. If the print was to be coloured, one block was used for each colour. Printing was by hand, and relied on only brushes and pads. No machinery for inking was used. The standard of woodblock printing was generally high. Although movable metal types were used in nearby Korea since about 1400, and possibly even during the period 1232–41,<sup>19</sup> they were not much used in Japan. From 1593 to about

19 Thomas Francis Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1925), pp.170, 254–5 n.3. See also Jeon Sang-woon, *Science and*



1648, copper or wooden movable types were used. There were, however, difficulties in the printing technology, especially as each movable type was hand made. The popular publishing industry demanded numerous reprints and new editions, and woodblock printing, once prepared, needed not be dismantled and set up anew before every new print run. Besides, popular works sold better if printed in a running, cursive script, impossible to recreate with the available movable types. The movable type technology was therefore eventually forgotten.

Most of the fiction from the various publishing houses was sensational in nature. The two most popular genres of prose fiction were known as *yomihon* ('reading books') and *kusazōshi* ('grass books'). *Yomihon* was prose fiction, usually characterised by historic and supernatural settings and didactic or moralistic story lines. The genre had its origin in the popular fiction of China. *Kusazōshi*, on the other hand, consisted of slim picture books, with the narrative and dialogue written in *hiragana* (phonetic characters) in the blank spaces of the full page illustrations. They were produced on cheap paper, each booklet containing five double pages. Both in appearance and in contents, they were remarkably similar to today's cartoons. The contents ranged from didactic children's folk tales to religious miracle tales and plots adapted from popular plays. Popular fiction centred on heroes with supernatural skills and interesting enemies, ghosts, and various malevolent spirits such as foxes and badgers (*tanuki*) that could change into human form. The Edokko had a deep belief in the supernatural, so ghosts – of various types but all of them without feet – caused much fear. So did the supernatural shape-changers and especially the particularly cunning white foxes that could assume the shape of beautiful women. Another highly popular literary genre was the satirical and – most important – salacious account of life in the entertainment district. Playbooks containing the certified text of popular dramas and usually several generally violent illustrations were also sure bestsellers, as were the directories (*saiken*) and ranking lists of Yoshiwara courtesans and their diverse talents and the popular actors with critical estimates of their abilities.

Indeed, ranking lists of everything from Yoshiwara prostitutes and sumō wrestlers to fashionable celebrities were always bestsellers. Yoshiwara ranking lists were published from the last quarter of the seventeenth century until as late as 1872 (and in another form, until 1958) twice a year, in a spring edition in the First Month and an autumn edition in the Seventh Month. Instructional manuals were also highly popular. Illustrated guidebooks to the great roads, cheap and reliable inns, and the famous temples and pilgrim routes were always popular, as were instructional works on almost any other activity, including self-help books on how to lead a good life. Among the guidebooks, the road-books must be mentioned. These were frequently used when travelling, containing every kind of information important to travellers, down to minutely accurate tables of the rates, charges, and prices for porters

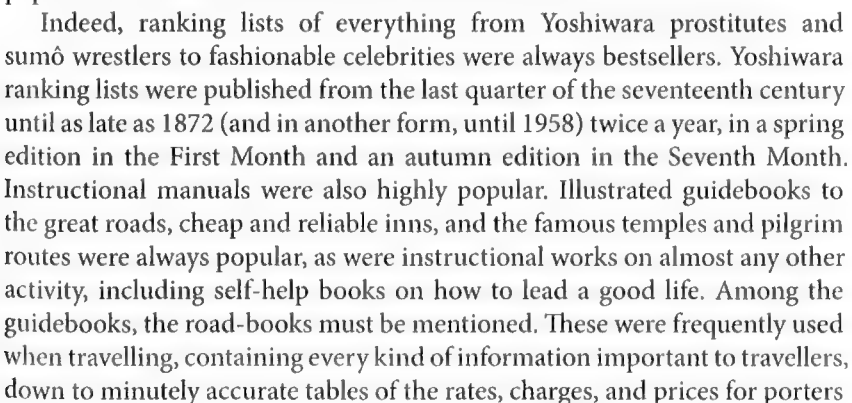
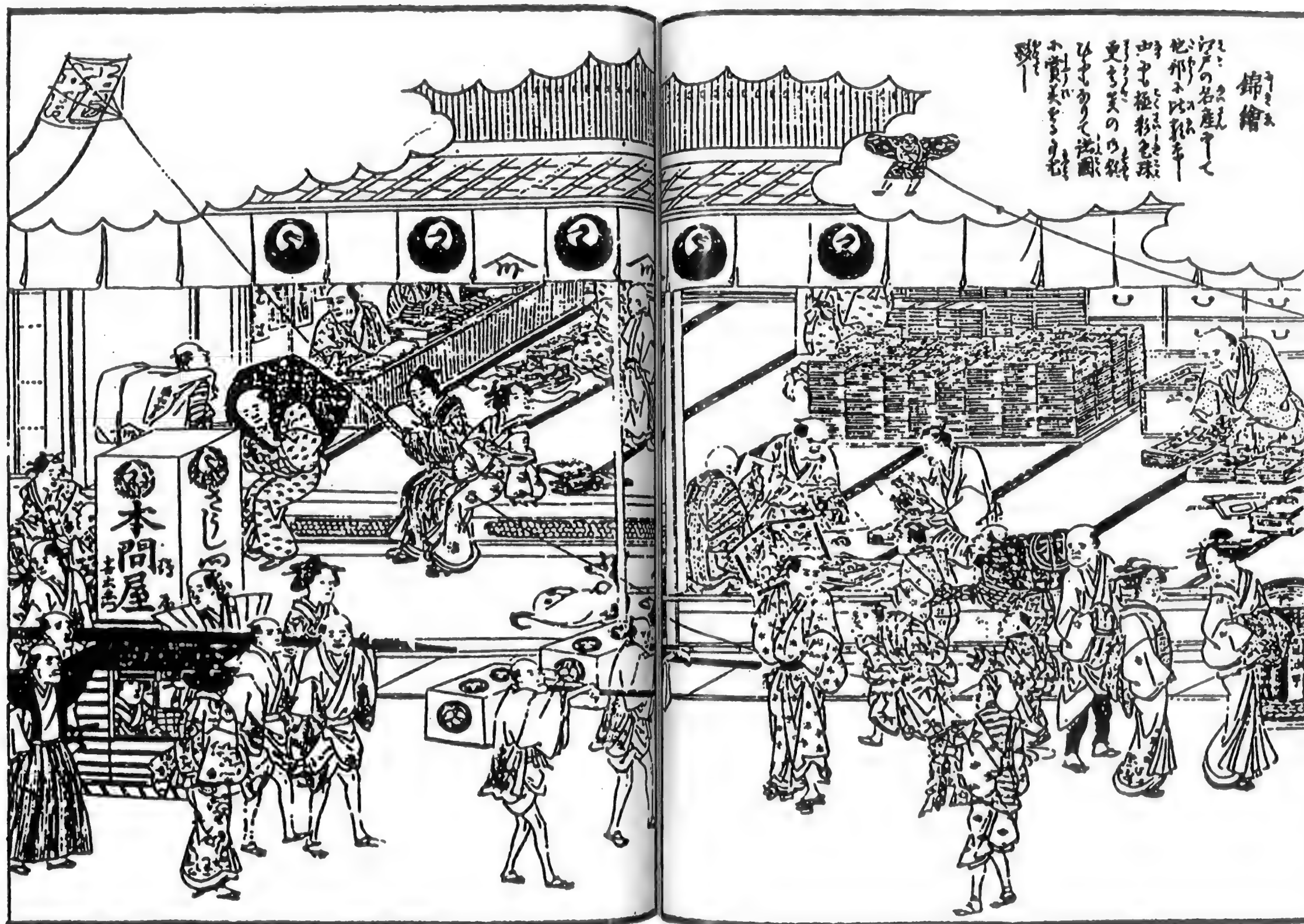


Fig. 36, overleaf. A major publishing house. In the foreground, a boy is flying a kite. To the left, a high-born lady passes by in a palanquin, with two samurai attendants.



at inns, ferries, and the like. Information on which towns or districts were famous for beautiful women were naturally also in great vogue.

Maps were also printed in Edo. These included city maps (*toshizu*), local maps (*chihôzu*), and route maps (*dôchûzu*). The latter were especially detailed. There were also philosophical treatises and scientific works, and their impact must not be underestimated. However, it is not unfair to say that their readers formed a distinct minority among the Edokko. Edo had, however, specialised bookstores for these obscure categories.

The shogunate maintained a strict censorship of books and maps, and censorship became increasingly harsh at the end of the Edo period. Pornography, frivolity, and lack of respect towards the Tokugawa clan were frowned upon, but so were serious books of many kinds, especially those that were critical of government policies or simply deemed to cause anxiety among the population. A work of the latter kind was the *Kaikoku heidan* ('Military Problems of a Maritime Nation'), published in Sendai in 1787–91 by the scholar and military scientist Hayashi Shihei (1738–93). This book focused on the need for coastal defences, a modern navy, and the possibility of foreign incursions into Edo Bay. Hayashi was the first independent writer in Edo period Japan who appreciated the fact that Japan, being a maritime nation, had other defence requirements than a landlocked country, and that a military threat also could come from a foreign nation. Hayashi especially singled out Russia as a potential enemy and strongly advocated the need for a modern navy. 'A sea road without frontiers leads from the Nihonbashi Bridge in Edo to China and Holland';<sup>20</sup> Hayashi pointed out.

However, Hayashi also made unwise remarks exalting the authority of the emperor as compared to the shôgun. He was accordingly denounced as a troublemaker and alarmist and in 1792, eight months after the publication of the completed work, he was arrested, sent to Edo, and all copies of his book as well as the printing blocks were confiscated. Hayashi had foreseen this end already in the preface to his work, but he had stubbornly gone ahead with publication. After six months in an Edo prison, Hayashi was released to house arrest in Sendai where the next year, confined in his brother's house, he died of melancholy and frustration. All copies of the book were ordered to be destroyed, but within months of Hayashi's arrest, a Russian ship arrived in the northern island of Ezo (now Hokkaidô), as if to prove his thesis. A reprint of the work was eventually permitted.

Most publishing houses were small family businesses, often located near a temple or shrine. The publisher was responsible for all operations, from preparing the manuscript, block cutting, printing, binding, to selling and distributing the book. The print runs were generally small, however, and the carved woodblocks did not last forever. A first printing was generally 200–300 copies only, and later runs would generally print a maximum of about 500. If the book sold more than 1,000 copies, the publisher had reason to celebrate and went to a shrine or temple to thank the appropriate deities.

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20 Hayashi Shihei, *Kaikoku heidan* ('Military problems of a maritime nation'), edited by Muraoka Tsunetsugu (Tôkyô: Iwanami Bunko, 1939), p.18.

Taking the fads into account, it may be fair to estimate that the average bestseller sold about 2,000 copies over a two-year period. Some accounts mention the number of sold copies for certain bestsellers as high as 8,000–9,000 copies, although this may be exaggerated. Later in the period, however, as many as 4,000 copies of some bestsellers were printed in a single year. Serious and literary works cost about as much as the rice a man would eat in a month for a five-volume work, or even more. Such works rarely ran into editions of more than 1,000. Cheaper fiction, however, cost considerably less, and the editions were accordingly quite often larger. Some domain school presses also published subsidised publications for their students. In 1857, a set of the Four Books of the basic Confucian classics (the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Greater Learning*, and *Golden Mean*) cost 924 *mon* from the Kagoshima domain school press of Kyūshū. At the time, this was the equivalent of about an eighth of a *koku* of rice, still a substantial amount despite the subsidy.

Japan counted many publishing houses (Fig. 36). By 1710, estimates indicate over 600 publishers and booksellers in Japan, most or all in the three cities of Edo, Kyōto, and Ōsaka. In 1808, Edo alone counted about 200 booksellers. The number of published works was vast. It has been estimated that only in the Genroku period (1688–1704), almost 10,000 titles were published and to some extent available. At this early date, the majority were published in Kyōto, but many Edo and Ōsaka publishers issued titles jointly with Kyōto publishers. The 1702 novel *Genroku taiheiki* ('Tales of the great peace of the Genroku period') describes the publishing industry of its time: 'Fictional tales are published in numbers beyond counting, with fads changing every year, every six months. Readers scarcely give a second glance to what was fashionable yesterday, for it's old hat today.'<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the Edo period, the principle of a publisher's copyright was established in Edo, in connection with the storage of the carved woodblocks used for printing. The writers were not protected, however, and most lived in abject poverty. Still, famous writers by then received regular payments for their work and could make a comfortable living as professional writers.

## Ukiyoe

The chief purpose of the woodblock-printed pictures (*ukiyoe*), for which the Edo period is famous, was to serve as publicity materials and advertisements for the entertainment districts and various forms of popular amusement. Both courtesans and actors had avid fans, who bought these prints from special shops. A print was not regarded as having an artistic value; it merely served as decoration for one's home. Prints were often pasted to the wall.

In the eighteenth century, each woodblock print cost 10 to 16 copper *mon*. In 1805, a record indicates that large brocade full-colour prints (*nishiki-e*) cost about 20 *mon* per sheet. From 1842, however, the authorities decreed that prices of more than 16 *mon* were excessive and therefore prohibited, and that colouring was to be limited to seven or eight colour blocks. This decree was, expectedly, soon ignored, and prices rose to 60 to 72 *mon* for a three-sheet set.

<sup>21</sup> Translation based on Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, p.116.





Fig. C25. Amusements on a summer evening. (Hosoda Eishi 1756–1815)



More luxurious prints (*surimono*, 'printed thing') were presumably yet more expensive. At this time, a bowl of simple food cost about 16 *mon*. As it was common to eat more than one bowl, most Edokko could afford a print or two.

Very little information is known about the size of the *ukiyo*e editions. The keeper of a secondhand bookshop called Fujiokaya Yoshizô (born 1793) reported in his diary in 1848 that a three-sheet print showing the shôgun hunting at the foot of Mount Fuji, priced at 72 *mon*, quickly sold 8,000 sets. On the other hand, another three-sheet set showing a group of turtles with their faces drawn to look like famous actors, priced at only 60 *mon*, sold only 50 out of 1,000 printed sets. More popular was the set of 51 sheets, featuring portraits drawn by the famous artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) of the 47 masterless samurai (*rônin*) and other key characters from the 'Forty-Seven Rônin' (*Chûshingura*) story as well as an explanatory text by the popular writer and artist Keisai Eisen (1790–1848). This series sold 8,000 copies, although it is not known whether complete sets or single copies are referred to.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the Edo period, most or almost all woodblock prints seem to have been published in units of 1,000 sheets. New woodblocks had to be cut after approximately 2,000 prints. Already after around 600 prints, a clear deterioration in quality is visible.

Another famous *ukiyo*e series was the popular picture books by the prominent painter, illustrator, and writer Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), collected under the general title of *Hokusai manga* and first published in Nagoya between 1814 and 1834.<sup>23</sup>

### Book Rental

Although books were highly popular in Edo, they – unlike mere prints – were often expensive to buy. An ordinary romantic novel could cost as much as the equivalent of food expenses for a month, while a popular pornographic work could cost up to about two weeks' worth of food. Serious works and multi-volume works were yet more expensive. Although cheap editions were also available, most books were accordingly bought only by the upper classes and well-to-do merchants.

To cash in on the reading taste of the less affluent classes, rental libraries (*kashihon'ya*) emerged around 1750. They soon became vastly more common than the actual bookshops, all or most of which doubled as publishers. In 1808, there were 656 rental libraries in Edo, operating in 12 groups or chains, and the number had grown to about 800 in 1830. The bookstores were considerably fewer in number. Most rental libraries were operated by lone peddlers (Fig. 37). A peddler did not need an office or a store. Instead he carried a wooden box full of books on his back, canvassing his neighbourhood – whether commoner or samurai – for potential customers. Each man is said to normally have had a round of customers of about 180 households. There were, however, also rental libraries with shops and collections of over 10,000 volumes, often employing

<sup>22</sup> Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, pp.185–86.

<sup>23</sup> This collection, as the name implies, may be the direct ancestor of the popular cartoons (*manga*) of modern Japan.

as many as 10 clerks. Books were rented for five days at a time, and the price was said to be less than one-tenth of the actual purchase price of the book. For ordinary illustrated books, the price was eight copper *mon* for five days.

### News Vendors

News-sheets, known as *kawaraban* ('roof-tile print'), were sold during the entire Edo period. These were large single, or occasionally multiple, sheets, printed by woodblock and usually distributed by bookshops. The news-sheets were often illustrated. The genre was most similar to today's tabloid newspapers.

The news-sheets revelled in disasters of all kinds. The 1855 earthquake and the subsequent fires, for instance, were used to fuel public interest for a prolonged period. Other favourite topics included spectacular suicides, revenge plots, and natural disasters such as floods. By the end of the Edo period, the battles between the opposing military forces provided favourite coverage. When no sufficiently spectacular disaster had occurred, the news-sheets (following the best – or worst – of the contemporary gutter press) invented fantastic stories and circulated spicy rumours. The more sensational the story, the higher the circulation of the news-sheet. Earthquakes, for instance, were attributed to sea monsters. If the publisher was unable to think up any new and original disaster, then ribald gossip from the brothel district was always a reliable column filler.

The news-sheets were sold in the streets by hawkers who read out selected, spicy passages to attract buyers. This practice gave rise to the alternate name *yomiuri* ('sell by reading'). The *Yomiuri Shinbun*, a true native of Tōkyō, is today one of Japan's leading newspapers.



Fig. 37. A book peddler.

## Animals in the City

As in all cities, nuisances such as insects, rats, and wild dogs were common in Edo. One of the popular sayings of Edo was that the city abounded in *iseya*, *inari*, *inu no kuso* ('Ise merchants, Inari shrines, and dog muck'). The streets were indeed infested with dogs, 'sleek, well-fed, audacious animals, who own no masters, but who seem to thrive on the community, and bid it defiance. They trot proudly about, with ears and tail erect, and are most formidable to meet in a by-lane,' commented Laurence Oliphant in 1858.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Oliphant, *Narrative 2*, 140.



Fig. C26. Samurai children engaged in garden cock-fighting, under the supervision of an elderly gentleman in formal dress.  
(Toyohara Chikanobu, 1838–1912)



Animals were otherwise not very common in Edo. Unlike the rulers of China, the shôgun maintained no zoological garden. Japanese usually did not keep animals as pets. With the exception of a few Pekinese dogs, imported by the Dutch or Chinese, dogs were not kept at home. Instead powerful Japanese dogs, such as the later fighting breed of dogs from Tosa in Shikoku, were used as watchdogs. These dogs were closely related to the dogs of northern Siberia and North America, and wild packs of them still roamed the country in the Edo period. Cats, of course, were often seen in and around homes. Most of them were only partially domesticated, thriving on the vermin that could be found in any town or city. Others were more tame. White cats with one yellow and one green eye were highly prized as lucky mascots for shops, as their eyes symbolised gold and silver. Because such a rare cat usually could not be obtained, the shopkeeper instead purchased a porcelain 'beckoning cat' (*maneki neko*) of the same colour, with one of its forepaws raised as if to beckon customers into the shop. Such cats could be found in many shops in Edo (and remain common in modern-day Japan).

A few other animals were also kept in the cities, for a variety of reasons. A small number of wild monkeys were captured and trained to dance for public exhibition. Other animals, such as the porcupine (*harinezumi*), were captured and displayed as an entertaining attraction. At home, many Japanese liked to keep crickets (*suzumushi* as well as other varieties) in a bamboo cage. The cricket's chirping in summer helped the Edokko to feel cool as the cricket was a symbol of the arrival of autumn (for this purpose, he also kept wind-bells hung on the balconies). Fireflies, too, were caught and kept in cages, as were small birds. This custom was said to first have been invented by a grocer, but it very rapidly developed into a major business.

Ponds were often stocked with carp, and if one could afford, goldfish. The latter, brought in from China during the Edo period, were often used as expensive and luxurious gifts. Other animals available from street-sellers included sparrows and other birds in cages, small eels, carp and other fish in jars, and tortoises. These animals were caught and sold for one specific purpose. The teachings of Buddhism specified that recompense in the next world was awarded to those who set free caged animals. Pious Buddhists therefore bought and released animals caught and imprisoned for this very purpose, thus exchanging mere monetary gains for spiritual advance. Some birds may have been trained to return to the salesman after they were released. Numerous old women and children earned their livelihood in this way, operating from stalls outside the main temples.

In this context, it is impossible not to mention the apparently somewhat mentally unbalanced fifth shôgun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi. From 1687, he issued a number of 'Edicts on Compassion for Living Things' (*Shôruï awaremi no rei*) that imposed strict penalties for the killing of birds and animals and cruelty to pets – especially dogs – other domestic animals, children, and the sick. Tsunayoshi is therefore irreverently remembered as the 'dog shôgun' (*inu Kubô*). Tsunayoshi's edicts may well have been a good thing for the animals concerned. As in other parts of the world, most Edo period Japanese treated animals at best with indifference. It was common in Edo to display captured wild animals in the amusement areas, and these

were poked with sticks until they behaved in a satisfyingly 'wild' manner. Tsunayoshi, too, cared little for the animals he ostensibly wanted to protect. The real reason behind the edicts was the advice he or his religiously afflicted mother, Keishōin (1627–1705), had received from a Buddhist monk. The latter had proclaimed that the death of Tsunayoshi's son and his subsequent childlessness was a punishment for having taken lives in a previous existence. The monk also recommended Tsunayoshi to choose the dog for his particular favour, as the shōgun was born in the Year of the Dog.

In 1695, large kennels were therefore established in Edo for the care of stray dogs. For the next two years, it was said that no less than 100,000 dogs were kept there. The kennels were financed by special taxes. At least one person was executed and some others were banished for wounding or killing dogs. The shōgun also insisted that dogs should be addressed in honorific terms, such as Mister or Madame Dog (*oinu-sama*). Despite the edicts, Tsunayoshi could not cure his childlessness. All edicts were soon rescinded by Tsunayoshi's nephew and successor.



## Plate 4. Shogunate fireman

(Illustration by Georgio Albertini

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Although not wearing gear quite as fine as that of the fireman officer, this fireman nonetheless has the full set of protective gear including a reinforced fabric breastplate (*muneate*), fireman's helmet with retractable forehead guard, and some armour under his robust civilian clothes.



# Crime and Punishment

## Ruffians and Gangsters

### Organised Crime

Although criminal street gangs and gang warfare were common in the seventeenth century, this form of crime was eventually violently suppressed by the authorities. One hundred years later, however, in the eighteenth century, a new and less wild but more enduring kind of organised crime appeared in and around Edo. From what originally were two distinct groups, the gamblers and the street peddlers, grew what in modern Tōkyō became the *yakuza*, the organised crime organisations.

Gambling was so rampant that it was often prohibited by law. This did not deter the gamblers, of course. From the end of the eighteenth century, professional gamblers known as *bakuchiuchi* or *bakuto* provided gambling places, for which they extracted a service fee from the players. The gamblers (*bakuto*, criminal slang for *tobaku*, gambling) did not originate in Edo. Instead they emerged along the busy highways and in the post station towns. Most of the latter played host to local gambling gangs. These gangs were strictly organised and controlled by their bosses. One sure way to maintain discipline was to introduce various punishments within the gang, for breaking the rules or any orders from the boss. In addition to ordinary punishments such as death and expulsion, the gamblers also introduced the custom of cutting off the top joint of the little finger (*yubitsume*) as an act of punishment or atonement.

The *yubitsume* custom was not limited to gamblers; even Yoshiwara prostitutes used to employ such measures as a mark of devotion to a particular lover. In the later years of Yoshiwara, this merely developed into yet another quaint custom. As it became expected of the courtesans to give proof of love by sending a finger to each patron, but as each courtesan only had 10 fingers, it became customary to purchase a finger or a fingernail removed from a corpse and send it instead. This may not have been a new habit, however. The much earlier writer Saikaku also mentions how courtesans bought fingernails and even hair removed from a corpse, to send as a pledge of fidelity. Some women instead sent fingers made of rice flour dough. Among criminal gangs, the use of similar measures for atonement also had a long history. If a famous

but unlikely story is true, then a notorious gang leader of the seventeenth century, Ude no Kisaburô or One-armed Kisaburô, cut off his entire right arm as an act of atonement in front of his swordsmanship teacher.

Another fashion among the gamblers was tattoos. In ancient times, tattoos had been in as wide use in Japan as in many other Eurasian societies, but those customs had been largely forgotten. The direct cause of the introduction of tattoos among gamblers was the use of tattoos as a mark of punishment. This was a common chastisement, originally of Chinese origin, that the authorities inflicted on criminals. In addition, by the late seventeenth century, manual labourers who worked with much of their body exposed, such as porters, carpenters, and manual labourers, indulged in full-body designs of intricate and complex tattoos. Many such workers developed criminal records. So did the gamblers, who soon joined in the quest for tattoos. The art of full-body tattooing (*irezumi*) developed among these groups. Prostitutes did likewise. The name of a favoured customer or a discreet number of dots equal to his age was often tattooed on an arm or inner thigh as an act of devotion.

Among the gambling gang members, the tattooing of a large part of the body developed into a test of strength. The process takes a long time – around 100 hours for a complete back tattoo – and is very painful. In Edo, a tool carved from bone or wood and tipped with a cluster of tiny needles was used. The needle tool was punched into the skin in a succession of thrusts. It was not a process to be undergone by cowards or weaklings.

Some gambling gangs developed ties with the authorities, but most of the time they were busy fighting each other in disputes over territory. Other gangs cooperated, and this led to the custom in which itinerant gamblers could visit the local gambling boss of another territory, stay for several days, and even receive a small amount of money for expenses and onward travel in exchange for temporary loyalty.

The gamblers may have formed the most colourful group of criminal gangs during the latter part of the Edo period – their customs, rituals, and folklore was to a large extent preserved into the present by the modern-day gangsters – but not all gangs in and around Edo were formed by gamblers. Organised groups of peddlers (*yashi* or *tekiya*) developed among the numerous markets and fairs held in Edo and in numerous other places in Japan. The origin of the peddlers is obscure; the first such bands may have been travelling medicine peddlers, or even highwaymen. By the mid 1700s, gangs of peddlers had banded together for mutual protection and thereby established control over the right to use booths and stalls in the market fairs held at temples and shrines. They were known as ruthless and deceptive traders, even though their trade was technically legal. The gangs of peddlers were well organised. A gang boss lived in a house which also served as gang headquarters and training centre for apprentice peddlers. The latter had to live there for some years to learn the business. Later, they were sent out to peddle the boss's goods. Only when successful could they become regular members of the gang. The regulars were allocated stalls by the boss and often goods to sell. The gang boss collected rents and protection money from the peddlers and pocketed the difference between the rents he demanded and those that he paid to the temple or shrine which owned the marketplace.

Higher rents and more protection money were naturally demanded from any peddler who was not part of the gang. A non-member had to pay hard cash for the privilege of opening a stall, and if he refused, then his customers were driven away, his goods were stolen, and he himself was beaten up.

Different peddler gangs often came into conflict over the right to certain fairs and marketplaces. Gangs located far from each other did not usually fight, however. As their members often had to move from fair to fair, they found it more profitable to extend protection to each other's members, naturally for a suitable fee, and to allocate the guest a favourable place to set up his stall.

The shogunate found it expedient to grant official recognition to many peddler gang bosses. Between 1735 and 1740, a number of gang bosses were appointed supervisors of the fairs and even received the right to have a family name and carry two swords, thus in effect being granted samurai status. The peddler gangs soon expanded their activities. Certain gangs began to organise their own fairs, travelling from town to town with goods, stalls, and sideshows of popular entertainment. Other gangs expanded the area under their control. All continued to take in wanted criminals and other fugitives as new members. Outcasts and misfits of every kind formed the traditional source of manpower for the peddler gangs.

Stage plays featuring gangsters of all sorts enjoyed great popularity in Edo. The more remote in time, the more noble and valiant the stage gangster. The lives of contemporary criminals, too, enjoyed the prolonged interest of any audience. From the nineteenth century, the great popularity on the stage ensured that the gangster became known under favourable terms such as *kyôsha* or *kyôkaku* ('valiant outsider'). Another term was the already mentioned *otokodate*, a brave man who stood up against injustice.

In modern Tôkyô, the organised gangster groups are known as *yakuza*. They remain organised in gangs (*kumi*), just like their Edo predecessors. Gangs come and go, and the separate traditions of gamblers and peddlers have merged. The name *yakuza* is said to be derived from the Edo period card game known as 'three-cards' (*sanmai karuta*). The game is similar to blackjack or 21, but the goal is to reach but not exceed 19. A losing hand in the game was known as *ya ku za* ('8, 9, 3'). The gamblers adopted this name for themselves as a gesture of bravado and scorn of conventional society. Although this explanation is neat and attractive, one wonders if not the old word *yakko* had something to do with the origin of the name, in conjunction with the old word *za*, which means group or association. Literacy was not necessarily widespread among the early *yakuza* gang members.

Even after the final destruction or cooptation of the gangs, disturbances of other sorts shook Edo. In 1733, 1783, 1787, and 1866, among other years, impoverished townsmen in Edo and other cities attacked rice shops in violent riots. It all began during a famine in 1733, when it was found that speculators stored food to corner the market. This resulted in the first of a kind of popular riot that became known as *uchikowashi* ('smashing' or 'breaking'). Many such riots took place in later years, and all enjoyed a kind of festival character. Rice and sake shops were the most common targets of the enthusiastic crowds.



Fig. C27. Swordsman. (*Honchō kendō ryakuden*, by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1798–1861)





Fig. C28. Swordsman fighting off the police. Their law enforcement tools of can be seen close to him. His dress is torn by the attempts of the police to restrain him. (*Honchō kendō ryakuden*, by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 1798–1861)



Fig. C29. Samurai firing a heavy matchlock musket. (Kôetsu yûshô den, 'Brave Generals from Kai and Echigo Provinces', by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1798–1861)





Fig. C30. Miyamoto Musashi, the famous *rônin* and swordsman who founded the style of swordsmanship with two swords known as *Nitenichi-ryû* or *Nitoichi-ryû*. He is practising with wooden swords, yet he wears chainmail under his daily dress. (Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1798–1861)



Fig. C31. Watanabe Kazuma, known from the famous Kagiya no Tsuji or Igagoe revenge incident in 1634, in which he located and killed Kawai Matagorô who had murdered his younger brother. Watanabe (here named Shizuma, not Kazuma, to avoid censorship) wears chainmail under his daily garments and has tied up his sleeves for combat. In reality, both Watanabe and Kawai were inexperienced fighters, so each was accompanied by a swordsmanship instructor. (Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1798–1861)



Fig. C32. The wife of Watanabe, a legendary hero, after a successful combat. Like many Japanese mothers, she carries her child on her back. (*Keisei suikoden*, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, 1839–1892)



The 1787 riots were not confined to Edo, as there were similar uprisings in Kyôto and Nagasaki at about the same time. This, too, was a period of famine with very high food prices. In Edo, the rioters numbered some 5,000, most of whom had recently arrived from neighbouring country districts and therefore chiefly made a living as day labourers. The rioting crowds attacked rice shops and the residences of wealthy merchants. Fittings and furnishings were smashed, shops were looted. Generally, the authorities did not prevent the rioters from working off their resentment as long as they only attacked merchants. The latter group was, after all, widely despised among samurai, and especially among those samurai who owed money to merchants. In 1787, however, things soon got out of hand and 30 arrests had to be made before things returned to normal.

Riots were never confined to the cities. In the provinces, local uprisings among farmers were common, especially when the tax burden grew too heavy. Such uprisings, however, had little if any impact on Edo. Not only impoverished commoners caused riots. By the late eighteenth century many samurai, especially among the *hatamoto* and *gokenin* categories, were heavily in debt to wealthy rice brokers and moneylenders. The shogunate therefore established a debt moratorium (*kienrei*) in 1789 and enforced a maximum rate of interest, which was lower than the rice brokers demanded. Encouraged by this protection, many *hatamoto* rioted in 1795. The rice brokers suffered such violence that the Edo town magistrate had to send a daily patrol to the neighbourhood in question merely to maintain a semblance of order.

Edo, as any major city, also had its share of ordinary everyday crime. A large number of petty thieves and other, lesser criminals infested Edo. In the 1820s, the arguably most famous was Nezumi Kozô ('Mouse Boy', died 1832). This nickname was given to him because he dressed in black and always escaped by jumping from one roof to another, disappearing in the darkness of the night. Nezumi Kozô soon acquired a reputation as an audacious thief who only broke into the houses of rich men, wealthy merchants, and great lords. Soon a rumour spread that he had given the money he had stolen to the homes of poor people without being noticed by anyone. For this reason, the public delighted in any news of the daring thief. He soon became a hero in popular novels and Kabuki plays. The truth, however, was far from attractive. Nezumi Kozô seems to have spent all his stolen money on gambling and drinking. In 1832, he was captured and executed by the authorities.

### Outcasts

Whilst it may seem unfair to place a description of the outcasts of Edo society together with those of ruffians and gangsters, the Edo authorities would have approved.

Japan counted two main groups of outcasts. One group, known as *eta*, was permanent and hereditary, while the second, known as *hinin*, was subdivided into hereditary and temporary outcasts. The hereditary *hinin* ('non-humans') consisted of the lower echelons of entertainers and beggars. The temporary *hinin*, who hoped eventually to return to organised life within the approved social classes, or that at least their children would do so, included for instance former criminals, persons in exile, and survivors of suicide pacts. The latter

were desperate couples who preferred to die to spend the rest of eternity together in the Buddhist paradise than to live separated. Such double suicides became common at the end of the seventeenth century and indeed turned highly fashionable following the successful puppet play 'The Love Suicides at Sonezaki' (*Sonezakishinjû*, written in 1703 and based on a real event), and more than 10 others on the same theme, by the acclaimed samurai dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon. In these dramas, a shop clerk or other commoner invariably falls in love with a courtesan and in the end the couple end their lives together.<sup>1</sup>

The shogunate was not amused by such immoral and frequently unfilial activities and banned the performance of these plays in 1722. At this time, double suicide was also declared illegal, and both successful and unsuccessful ones were treated as crimes. Those who died had their corpses exposed as if they had been executed criminals, and any survivors were forced to become *hinin*. Others became *hinin* when economic or other circumstances forced them to take up work of types that only *hinin* would consider doing. These jobs almost always had to do with dead corpses, something repulsive not only to the tenets of Shintô, which declared such persons contaminated, but also to Buddhism, which prohibited the taking of life. Common professions included executioners, torturers, and jailers in the prisons; workers handling the exposure of the corpses of executed criminals or the supply of such corpses to the professional sword testers, who occasionally tested new swords on corpses; and labourers clearing up after natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, and typhoons. Such disasters frequently resulted in vast numbers of corpses, victims with no surviving relatives to dispose of them. *Hinin* were then called in to dispose of the dead.

The *hinin* were also compelled to care for victims of contagious diseases. Some had to tend graves in cemeteries, guard tombs, sweep the streets, and collect garbage. Many *hinin* were virtually press-ganged into these occupations. Others had little choice but to accept. *Hinin* were at times even prohibited from making a living by any means other than begging. Young, female *hinin* also occasionally worked as wandering singers known as *torioi* ('bird-scarers'), playing the *shamisen*. Others took part in other occupations associated with entertainment. It must be remembered that even wealthy actors were technically considered outcasts.

The hereditary *hinin* lived as best as they could, usually in hovels and temporary shacks. Certain *hinin* were occasionally able to receive assistance from their families, although the shogunate discouraged such relationships as they breached the proper social order. In Edo, *hinin* were registered according to their place of residence. Each group was also provided with a head or leader. In Edo, the most important of these leaders was Kuruma Zenshichi, a hereditary name that went with the equally hereditary leadership of the *hinin* in Asakusa. According to legend, the first Zenshichi had been a

<sup>1</sup> Fashion suicides were not restricted to Japanese society, as testified by the very similar situation in Europe following the 1774 publication of *The Sorrows of Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

member of a prominent samurai family. He had, in revenge for his brother's death, attempted to kill Tokugawa Ieyasu. The attempt failed, but Zenshichi was spared on condition that he became the head of the *hinin*.

Most regular members of Japanese society despised the *hinin*. This was further encouraged by the fact that all *hinin* not employed by the authorities were easily distinguished by having their hair cropped short all over the head. They were not allowed the hairstyle of ordinary people, nor to cover their heads. Their clothes had to end above the knee. Women were forbidden to shave their eyebrows and blacken their teeth. A *hinin* could in certain cases be restored to the human race and organised society, for instance as a reward for duties well performed. Restoration was never common and included the need for a ritual cleansing.

Despite the chance of restoration, and because of the connection with convicts, the *hinin* were considered inferior to the other main group of outcasts, the hereditary *eta*, who could never leave their inherent role as outcasts. The *eta* ('pollution abundant') were also organised in communities. In Edo, their head carried the hereditary name of Danzaemon. As the hereditary *eta* were considered superior to the *hinin*, Danzaemon was regarded as more important than Kuruma Zenshichi, the leader of the *hinin*. It was said that Danzaemon's family came from the province of Settsu in western Japan. Danzaemon claimed to trace his pedigree back to the celebrated twelfth-century shôgun Minamoto no Yoritomo, who in his youth for a brief period while in exile was married to the daughter of a farmer. He left the young woman pregnant, never to return. She gave birth to a boy, who accordingly grew up as a farmer, even though his father eventually made himself ruler of all Japan. A few generations later, the house of Yoritomo failed, and another warrior clan, the Hôjô, rose to supremacy. Eventually the head of the Hôjô heard that a descendant of Yoritomo lived as a farmer far from the capital. According to the story, he summoned the farmer and offered to promote him to the rank of samurai. The stubborn farmer, however, answered: 'My lord, if I become a samurai and the retainer of some noble, I shall not be so happy as when I was my own master. If I may not remain a yeoman, let me be a chief over men, however humble they may be.' The lord grew angry at this arrogant demand, and to fulfil the farmer's wish, he appointed him chief of the *eta*. In this position, the farmer did indeed become chief over the most humble of men.

The first Danzaemon in Edo lived for many years in Muromachi near Nihonbashi, but he and the other *eta* were in the early Edo period moved to what is now part of Imado 1- and 2-chôme at Asakusa. There Danzaemon enjoyed the amazingly high revenue of 3,000 *koku*, and he and his family lived in style even before the end of the Edo period. But there was no way of escaping from his class. Danzaemon, together with his subordinates, who were called 'heads of the huts' (*koyagashira*), formed the government of the *eta*. Besides Asakusa, other well-known dumping grounds for *eta*, *hinin*, beggars, drifters, and freed convicts included Yotsuya Samegabashi Tanimachi ('Sharkskin Bridge Valley Town,' possibly named as a pun after a horse named Same ('Sharkskin') which fell into the river there), west of the

city centre, Shiba Shin'amichô to the south, and Shitaya Man'nenchô to the north-east.<sup>2</sup>

Being true outcast in every meaning of the word, the *eta* lived in separate quarters in a town or city, or in separate settlements in the country. It was illegal for them to conceal their origins and status as *eta*, or to move from the restricted areas of their residence. Within these areas, however, they were allowed to be quite prosperous and live comfortable, ordinary lives, although apart from all other social groups. Not only were the *eta* not included with the rest of the population in any census, but their villages, when situated upon a road, were not measured into the length of the road. As the cost of hiring porters and animals was fixed by the shogunate according to the distance travelled, a traveller hiring a palanquin or a horse travelled for free while passing an *eta* village.

The *eta* specialised in their own trades: animal processing, the disposal of animal carcasses, the making of leather, and the production of leather goods. Leather-making was a necessary trade in Edo period Japan, in particular for the military, but was of course in every way contrary to Buddhist teachings. Despite this, butchers, tanners, and leather craftsmen were essential parts of Japanese society. Most *eta* had regular shops where they made and sold their goods. The really poor *eta* wandered from house to house, working as cobblers, mending old leather goods.

By the Edo period, the origin of the *eta* was already forgotten and it remains largely unknown to this day. Some were presumably the descendants of leatherworkers who lived before the introduction of Buddhism. Many were the descendants of captives from ancient wars. Large numbers of captives seem to have been brought from Korea in the sixteenth century, but by then there were already outcasts in Japan. Others may have been imported as slaves from mainland Asia in yet earlier wars. This at least would explain why most *eta* seemed to live in western Japan.

Neither *eta* nor *hinin* were free to choose their place of living. Their residence was limited to designated hamlets (*buraku*). By the end of the Edo period in 1867, the number of *eta* and *hinin* was estimated to be about 400,000 out of Japan's total population of 33 million people, or 1.2 percent.<sup>3</sup>

## Law and Punishment

### Criminal Justice

After a suspect criminal had been arrested, the prisoner was taken to the magistrate on duty. Less dangerous suspects were detained at the magistrate's

2 The role of these locations grew more important after the Edo period, when they became known as the 'three big poor people's ghettos' (*sandai himminkutsu*).

3 In 1871, a law was promulgated which prohibited social disabilities due to birth. Although the *hinin* thereafter appear to have been absorbed in mainstream society, the descendants of *eta* have remained a people apart. The name *eta* is no longer used; their descendants are today known as *burakumin*.



Fig. 38. A flogging. A bucket of water is kept nearby to clean the ground of blood afterwards.

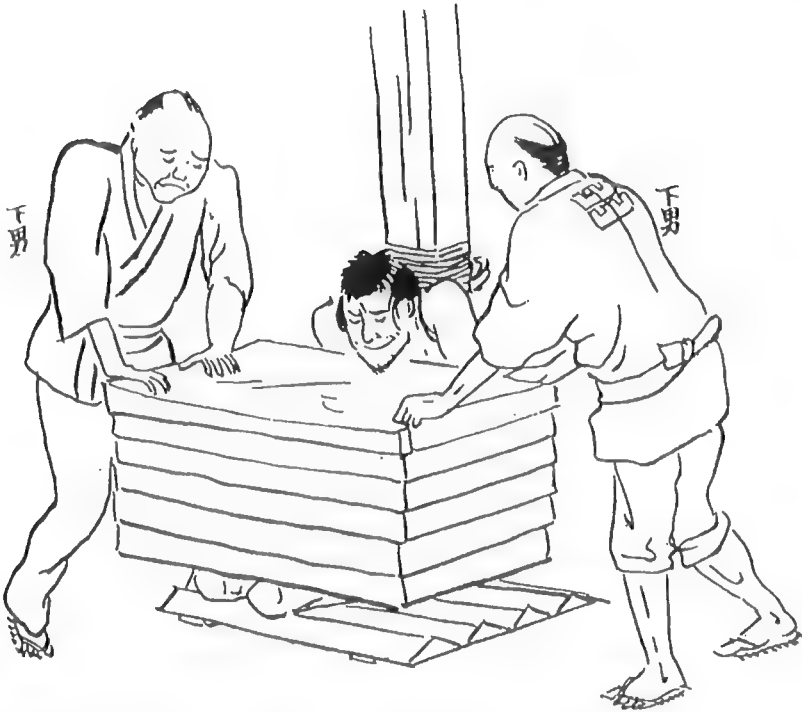
office, but the more violent ones were, with a warrant from the magistrate, taken straight to the Edo Prison in Kodenmachô.

The criminal investigation and court procedure was based on the Chinese legal system. Ancient Chinese law relied upon the fundamental principle that no criminal can be pronounced guilty unless he has confessed to his crime. Although this was obviously a principle of justice, the principle did not immediately allow for the fact that hardened criminals could escape from punishment by refusing to confess even when confronted with irrefutable evidence. Only one solution to this problem was ever found: torture. At first, the magistrate obviously would make an attempt to persuade the accused to confess. If, however, the suspect lacked the politeness to do so, sterner methods were relied upon, among them flogging (Fig. 38). To extract a confession, less considerate magistrates routinely applied torture. It was, for instance, common to press the accused with heavy stones (Fig. 39), apply water torture, and rely upon even more gruesome methods to extract a confession.

In China, there was at least a minimal notion to control excesses or abuse of the inflicting of torture, as not only the magistrate but the entire personnel of his tribunal could be punished, often with the extreme penalty, if the suspect received permanent bodily harm or died under excessive torture. At least from time to time, sharp control was imposed on the magistrates by the higher authorities. In addition, capital sentences had to be ratified by the Imperial throne, and every condemned criminal had the right to appeal to the higher judicial instances, in theory going up as high as to the emperor himself. The Chinese control system was therefore preventive of at least the most blatant abuse. Such was not the case in Japan. In Edo, the convict had no



Fig. 39. Torture with heavy stones. However, rope was normally tied around the stones to keep them together. The men applying the stones are lesser servants of the court known as *genan*.



right of appeal. Japanese courts of course had several rules on how torture was to be implemented, to offer some level of minimum protection to the suspect. One such rule said that any interrogation of a woman must be stopped if her thigh was exposed. Just magistrates then had the problem, it was said, of how to deal with female criminals who deliberately exposed themselves when the interrogation turned to questions they were unwilling to answer. Bribery also seems to have been common, if not outright expected. The assumption of the court, if not the theory behind its work, was that a suspect was guilty until proven otherwise. Apart from bribery or the occasional intervention of a just magistrate, it was not easy to be acquitted in an Edo court.

After the prisoner had confessed his crime, he was taken before the magistrate. On the 'white sandbank' (*shirasu*), an area of the courtyard in front of the magistrate's office spread with white gravel, the bound prisoner knelt before the magistrate. Upper-class defendants such as priests, samurai, and some others were allowed to instead sit on the stairs leading from the *shirasu* to the magistrate's desk. The 'white sand' was symbolical of the truth of what was said there, and it has been suggested that behind the name *shirasu* lies, perhaps, the verb *shiraseru* meaning 'to report'. The prisoner and any witnesses knelt in front of the magistrate and gave their evidence. The court procedure was designed to intimidate suspect and witnesses alike. Neither the accused nor the plaintiff had any lawyers to assist them, and both had to remain in the kneeling position during the entire court session. Neither was allowed to call any witnesses. The ancient Chinese court procedure had been explicitly intended to act as a deterrent, to impress on the people the horrible consequences of getting involved with the law. In Japan, the procedure had the same effect. Cooperating witnesses or prisoners

were sometimes allowed the favour to kneel on rough mats, but recalcitrant ones were instead forced to kneel on wooden implements made of a number of triangular, quite sharp pieces of wood. To kneel on such a device was a painful experience.

Not all magistrates were bad, of course. One of them, the aforementioned Ōoka Tadasuke, is generally credited with implementing humanitarian reforms, especially in regard to prisoner interrogation.

After the confession followed the sentence. The guilty had to be punished. Punishments (*shioki*) came in six categories:

1. Capital punishments
2. Corporal punishments, imposed only on commoners
3. Loss of liberty, which usually meant imprisonment or placement in manacles (*tejō*) for a commoner but exile (*tsuihō*) or house arrest for a samurai or priest
4. Loss of property (known as *kessho*, often imposed together with exile)
5. Loss of status, in which a samurai was demoted to commoner status (known as *kaieki*) and a commoner was demoted to *hinin* status. The former was utilised by the shogunate also for political reasons, in which the crime was constructed from either a true violation of the regulations or for any other reason, such as failure to assure stable succession in one's family. Especially in the early part of the period, the shogunate sought to reduce the number of lords in order to appropriate their lands.
6. Loss of honour, a form of official reprimand

Most serious was of course the death penalty (*shizai*). It existed in a number of different forms, of increasing painfulness to the recipient. Easiest was simple decapitation (*kubikiri* or *zansai*). Capital punishment was often sentenced together with an additional penalty known as 'dragging around' (*hikimawashi*), in which the criminal, dressed in white, was led on horseback through the city to the execution ground, followed by *hinin* and with flags and plaques inscribed with the prisoner's name and the nature of the offence displayed at the head of the procession. This was meant to induce shame, a most serious punishment according to old Chinese law. The custom was imported from the Chinese legal system, and it remains in use today in China. To add shame to the injury, it was at times also decided to expose the corpse to the public after the execution (*sarashikubi* or *gokumon*).

A criminal who had murdered his master (this most heinous crime was known as 'master murder' or *shugoroshi*) or one of his own relatives was condemned to death by crucifixion (*haritsuke*). Two positions were used; upside down, hanging from the feet, or in upright position, bound at hands and feet. In either style, the prisoner was afterwards actually executed by being impaled by two spears, one from each side. These unfortunate

prisoners could also be sentenced to *nokogiribiki* or *takenokohiki* (meaning something like 'to cut off the head with a bamboo saw'). He was then placed in a special hole at the southern end of Nihonbashi Bridge with only neck and head protruding. The neck was placed in shackles, two saws made of bamboo were left on either side of the protruding head, and a convenient mark was made on the neck. Any passer-by was then invited to try his hand at execution. This was, for instance, the punishment for the horrible crime of patricide. However, this punishment had – at least by the end of the Edo period – changed so that the prisoner was merely killed and displayed in this frightening position, together with the bloodied saw.

The death penalty was imposed on crimes which included murder, robbery, theft of values of 10 *ryô* of gold or more, and some kinds of adultery. As fire was so much feared, any convicted arsonist was burned alive (*hiaburi*). The corpses of some executed criminals were used for a special purpose. The swords of the shôgun used to be tried upon corpses (provided the corpse was not tattooed, as a tattoo was supposed to sully the soul of the sword) so as to determine the suitability and quality of the weapon. This duty belonged to the public headsman, who for a bribe of two *bu* substituted the weapon of a private individual for that of the shôgun. Many samurai were eager to have their swords tested.

Samurai were not, as a rule, subjected to execution. Instead they were sometimes allowed to preserve their honour by committing suicide (*seppuku*). The samurai himself had to cut his abdomen open, and then a trusted friend, the second (*kaishaku*), struck off his head, so that the samurai's death struggle was not unnecessarily prolonged.

Next in severity to the death penalty was banishment. This sentence, too, existed in various degrees, from exile on some distant island (*entô*, the original version of this sentence) down to banishment beyond 10 *ri* (not quite 40 km) from Edo (*Edo jûri shihôbarai*), banishment from Edo itself (*Edobarai*), or merely exclusion from the prisoner's home district (*tokorobarai*). Other variants forbade the use of particular roads, including the Tôkaidô, and residence in certain provinces or cities. Certain provinces were used for exile purposes, and the convicted criminal remained under police surveillance during the period of exile. Exile and total confiscation of property was the punishment for gambling, manslaughter, statutory rape, and breaking priestly vows of chastity. Exile was in principle for life, and any attempt to return was punishable by death; however, pardons could be granted. A banished criminal was frequently moved to his place of banishment in a special, closed palanquin (*tômarukago*, 'Chinese round basket'). This type of palanquin was originally used for transporting poultry. It was adapted for moving criminals long distances. The criminal's name was displayed on the palanquin, so as to induce shame and warn onlookers not to get in trouble with the law.

There was also a system of lighter punishments for minor crimes. These too varied according to the social class of the convicted prisoner. Restrictions on liberty among samurai and priests included house arrest. One's front gate was then nailed shut. Discreet exit at night may or may not have been permitted, according to the circumstances. Entry of others, likewise, was

restricted. Visitors were allowed to enter only at night (a punishment known as *hissoku*). There were various degrees of this punishment, and at times commoners could also be condemned to a similar punishment. Among the upper classes – who had large residences – the punishment was known as *heimon* ('closed gate'), while among commoners it was known as *tojime* ('door shutting'). The period of confinement lasted for 50 or 100 days. Women could be punished by having their hair shaved off.

Certain crimes, such as Buddhist monks and priests caught indulging in the pleasures of the flesh, or (after 1722) the parties to an unsuccessful double suicide, were sufficiently wicked to merit public exposure in fetters or handcuffs, the latter for a period of three days, whether dead or alive. The location was the southern end of the Nihonbashi Bridge. A sign with the prisoner's name and crime was displayed, usually on his or her chest. These criminals were then often forced into the *hinin* class of outcasts.

Siebold reported that caning (*tataki*) with bamboo canes (*hōkijiri*) was used as a punishment for certain crimes, following Chinese precedents. This type of punishment, however, although part of the Tokugawa code, was discontinued at the latest during the eighteenth century.

Thieves (of values less than 10 *ryō*) were sometimes punished by tattoos on the forehead or arm, to show that the convict was a criminal (Fig. 40). The tattoos also showed by symbol or by the use of a Chinese character where the person had been convicted. Tattooing was an optional punishment, used instead of exile. Like many other Edo period punishments, tattooing remained in use until early in the succeeding Meiji period, in this case 1870. The tattoos grew fashionable among hardened criminals and gangsters, and

Fig. 40. Lesser crimes were sometimes punished by tattoos on the forehead or arm, to show that the convict was a criminal.



the art of tattooing the entire body developed among these groups during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### Prisons and Labourers' Camps

Prisons were not only used for convicted criminals, but also served as places for detention while a case was pending in court. Treatment in them was invariably harsh. Imprisoned samurai of *hatamoto* rank or higher and high-ranking priests were lodged apart from the commoners, and also separately according to whether they were superior or inferior in rank. A lower-ranking prisoner with a good record was chosen as the high-ranking convict's personal attendant. Lower samurai, priests, and doctors were detained in one of two halls known as *agariya*, a word paradoxically written with the same Chinese characters as *ageya*, the tea houses of Yoshiwara. One of these *agariya* served for prisoners awaiting shipment to the islands for exiled convicts in the Izu archipelago. Women were imprisoned in separate areas. The lowest class of convict, however, lived in utter squalor in the general prison.

If a serious fire broke out near the prison, all prisoners were temporarily released. If they failed to return at the specified time, they were of course punished by very heavy penalties, when caught. Most, or sometimes all, prisoners typically showed up after a fire, a fact that gives some indication on the strength of authoritarian rule in Japan.

The prisons were not nice places. Both contemporary illustrations and written accounts confirm that the word used to describe a prison – *gokuya* ('prison' when properly spelled, but also perhaps 'hell-house') – was most appropriate. The Dutchman Overmeer Fisscher described the conditions of a prison of the early nineteenth century.

In these prisons or dungeons fifteen or twenty persons are crowded together in one room, situated within the walls of the government-house, lighted and ventilated only by a solitary small grated window in the roof. The doors of these dungeons are never opened except to carry in or bring out a prisoner. The captives are refused books, pipes, and recreation of every kind; they are not allowed to take their own bedding in with them, and their silk or linen girdle is exchanged for a straw band, the wearing of which is reputed to be highly degrading. The filth of these dungeons is removed through a hole in the wall, and through the same hole the food of the prisoners is introduced. Their victuals are of the very worst description; and although the prisoners are allowed to purchase or to receive from their friends those of a better kind, no individual is permitted to enjoy what he has thus acquired unless it be sufficient to satisfy the appetites of all his dungeon companions, since the inmates of these detestable abodes, being left wholly to their own government while confined there, uniformly establish the law of the strongest, and in its worst form: a ruthless tyranny, where the strongest means the majority.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Philipp Franz von Siebold, et al., *Manners and Customs of the Japanese* (London: John Murray and New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841. Reprinted by Charles E. Tuttle, Tōkyō, 1973), pp.163–4.



It was necessary to bring some coins into the prison, with which to bribe the leading convicts and the prison officials. As convicts were invariably searched upon entering the prison, these coins were equally invariably hidden in the convict's body cavities. As soon as he had entered, the prisoner had to hand over whatever he had to the local top-dog among the prison inmates. There was a strict hierarchy within the prison walls, and it was immediately apparent who was the leader. He had appropriated for himself as many as seven of the tatami mats that were spread on top of the cold wooden floorboards. Around his throne of tatami mats, his assistants sat on lower stacks of mats. Everybody wanted a bribe, and the size of the bribe decided what justice was available within the prison walls. Sanitary conditions were appalling, and death from disease was common. Torture was frequently applied, most of the time by the prisoners themselves. The office of keeper of Edo Prison (*shûgoku* or *rôya bugyô*) was hereditary in the Izushi family. The keeper had 50 *dôshin* and 30 assistants (*genan*) subject to him.

In 1790, a system of 'temporary extra labourers' camps' (*kayakukata ninsoku yoseba*) was instituted in Edo. One such camp was already established on distant Sado island since 1778, well known because of the work of the inmates as the 'water-changer labourers' camp' (*mizugae ninsoku yoseba*). Many vagrants arrested in Edo and other shogunate cities were brought there. In Edo itself, a workhouse (*yôikusho*) for the unemployed had been built in Fukagawa Morinmachi in 1780, but it had been abolished by 1786.

The first 'labourers' camps' in Edo were established in 1791 to provide lodging and rehabilitation assistance for beggars, vagrants, and (after 1820) also criminals who would otherwise have been banished. The latter were those who were guilty of minor criminal offences only. The establishment of camps was regarded as a social reform to ease unrest caused by the severe Tenmei Famine of 1782–87, a misfortune that among other problems caused severe rice riots in Edo. The shogunate hoped to rehabilitate vagrants and unemployed farmers by teaching vocational skills, offering work, and in some cases providing homes. The first Edo camp was located on the small island of Ishikawajima near the mouth of the Sumida River, which by then was not yet part of the reclaimed land of present Tsukishima. This island had already in 1624 or 1625 been made into a refuge for vagrants and beggars, so there was a precedent.

The new camp was large and accommodated several buildings. Designed to house 120 to 130 inmates at a time, it was overcrowded from the very beginning. During its first three decades, the camp generally housed 140 to 150, then up to 600 at a time during the 1830s. Rice and money were provided at public expense. The inmates were put to work, for which they also received wages. Inmates were to serve a basic term of three years, after which they were eligible for release if their behaviour had been satisfactory. If so, they were given a small sum of money as well as their wage savings. Those with satisfactory records and an outside guarantor could be released at any time. All inmates wore uniforms, indicating how long time they had been in the camp. Upon entering, each received a red or light-brown garment dyed with a pattern of white water-drops. The second year, this garment was replaced by one with fewer drops. In the third year, finally, this

was exchanged for one of a solid colour. Within the camp, life was strictly regulated. Those who fled work within the camp were tattooed and flogged, and anyone who attempted to escape but was caught had to suffer the death penalty. The official in charge of the camp was known as *yoseba bugyô*. He had a staff of several officers, who supervised life in the camp.

To further the moral education of the inmates, the shogunate soon after the camp's establishment appointed a Shingaku ('heart learning' – a religious movement with special emphasis on the Neo-Confucian virtues) lecturer to visit the camp three times a month to give the inmates lectures or sermons on suitably moralistic topics. By the end of the Edo period, a camp factory was started, in which released prisoners were given the opportunity to manufacture oil, a necessity for the many oil lamps used in Edo. By then, the camps served in most ways as prisons. After the Edo period, all camps were accordingly replaced by modern prisons.

It has been estimated that on average about 7,000 people were detained in Edo prisons each year, and out of that number some 3,000 were put to death in one way or another. This figure is high, and the latter figure may be exaggerated.

### Civil Justice and the Administration of Awards

In civil disputes, the magistrate felt no need to deal with the interested parties quite as harshly as in criminal cases. The plaintiff, when he first turned up at court, had his statement recorded, after which he was told to come back after a few days. This was a remarkably humanitarian method to settle unimportant disputes, as some hotheads invariably rushed to court without realising the consequences. If the plaintiff refrained from returning to the court, then all was well. The case was dismissed. If the plaintiff did turn up, an investigation had to be initiated. Only then would the magistrate himself be involved, at first advising the plaintiff to reconsider. If the plaintiff persisted, a *yoriki* was assigned to the investigation. The *yoriki*, in his turn, usually delegated the investigation further down in the hierarchy. The magistrate eventually delivered the final verdict, but he otherwise left the case to the *yoriki* on any but the most difficult occasion.

Yet, most disputes were settled out of court, in the office of the community head or some other member of the city administration. Only extreme cases were ever brought to the attention of the magistrate. It should also be mentioned that the shogunate not only administered punishments; deserving individuals also received rewards. This was first resorted to by the shogunate (in imitation of practices in at least one domain) in 1682. Confucian thought demanded that as crime was punished, virtue was to be rewarded. The shogunate in particular wished to recognise and reward examples of exceptionally filial conduct. Of course, only cases that came to the notice of the authorities could be rewarded. The procedure to locate deserving cases was strictly arbitrary, however, and the programme came with neither the intention nor the opportunity to find all. When a suitable individual was found, he or she was awarded with suitable gifts, often of a monetary nature, or at least public recognition. Commoners were certainly eligible for these rewards, and many lists of filial and virtuous individuals have been preserved.

**Plate 5. Samurai female, armed with a *naginata*, the Japanese glaive, and prepared to protect home, family, and clan.**

(Illustration by Georgio Albertini

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Dressed in the customary female kimono, she is ready to tie up her wide sleeves with a cloth band in preparation for combat at a moment's notice. Samurai ladies commonly trained with the *naginata*, but many also learnt to use a sword. By the late nineteenth century, a notion emerged among former samurai that females should only use the *naginata*, never the sword, which then was deemed unsuitable for ladies. However, events before and in the aftermath of the

Edo period show that samurai ladies customarily carried swords in battle. Based on forensic analysis of skeletons found during several battlefield excavations from the civil wars immediately preceding the Edo period, the Japanese anthropologist and forensic expert Suzuki Hisashi argues that as many as a third of the participants in these battles were women. His statistics suggest that many of them could have been part of army units.



## Conclusion: Soldiers and Civilians

We have seen that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Tokugawa-ruled Japan was an advanced, outward-looking country. Previously preoccupied by internal warfare, Japan was unified, militarily strong, and technologically developed. Japanese traders, mercenaries, and adventurers were a common sight in South-East Asia, with flourishing overseas colonies, especially in the Philippines, Siam, and Java. The armies of Japan were a match for any enemy, well-armed and with considerable combat experience. In hindsight, it is easy to imagine continued Japanese expansion and increased international trade throughout the Pacific and East Asia.

Yet, we have also seen that history took a different course. In 1635, the shogunate government of Japan retreated into enforced seclusion. While the age of enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and the subsequent global expansion of the European nations transformed the world, Japan chose isolation and stagnation.

We have postulated that a major reason for this policy decision was the escalating, but hushed-up, military weakness of the shogunate which first manifested itself in 1634. The generation which fought at Sekigahara and Ōsaka had been replaced by what near-contemporary Japanese scholars such as Dazai Shundai described as spoiled and effeminate city samurai among whom 'but one man in several thousands . . . is likely to have any military value'. Such harsh words could be dismissed as merely the reflection of a yearning for the good old days which is common among men who reach a certain age. However, in the case of the shogunate army there seems to be a core of truth in Dazai's observation. Technically, the shōgun's soldiers retained their warrior status, but in reality, very few had the training, or inclination, for the soldierly occupation. Samurai remained active in law enforcement and in the fire brigades, but they did not train as military units (or at all, in most cases). Many did not even own the weapons which they were duty-bound to bring in case of mobilisation. Why should they, since no mobilisation took place, was expected, or indeed would take place for the next two centuries?

In other words, it was the shogunate's awareness of its military decline, provoked by the lack of a trained army, which was the cause of its sudden isolationist foreign policy. It was also the lack of a trained army which, likewise, made the shogunate embark upon a domestic policy which entailed the establishment of what effectively was a police state. Realising that its badly organised army no longer could sustain Tokugawa supremacy against the other great lords on the battlefield, it became increasingly important to maintain security through legislation, regulation, domestic surveillance, the demand to leave daimyō families as hostages in Edo, and the bleeding of the monetary resources of the lords through mandatory measures such as the requirement to maintain separate residences. In effect, Tokugawa Japan had the attributes of both a strong and a weak state. The shogunate maintained political control through administrative measures and surveillance, yet it remained militarily weak.

Under these conditions, there also had to be a repression of most kinds of social creativity or intellectual growth. In particular scientific research and cultural observations which revealed the military weakness of the shogunate, vis-à-vis the lordly domains or foreign countries, had to be suppressed. Henceforth, creativity was most safely practiced in the red-light district, which from this time acquired a primary role in cultural developments. No wonder then that Edo period Japan was a time of peace, but also of stagnation. Japanese society in the Edo period, 'as a result of social petrification, stereotyping of social roles, and loss of human freedoms, was itself moving in the direction of doll-like mechanical manipulation.'<sup>1</sup> There was a strong social pressure to conform, and not to challenge existing mores. As a result, the outward-looking and creative Japanese of the sixteenth century transformed dramatically.

All evidence points to the seclusion policy of the Edo period, together with the way of life in Edo itself, as the primary drivers of this drastic transformation of national character. The Edo period 'is the period in which Japan's distinctive culture attained its apex . . . it provides valuable insights into the country's modernization and why Japan is what it is today.'<sup>2</sup> Although eighty per cent of the total population were farmers, the farmers did not create what today is regarded as the national culture of Japan, despite the cherished myth of the Japanese as a nation of rice farmers since ancient times. It has been argued that in the Edo period 'we can see the formation of Japanese values and social structures that continue to exist today. It is thus evident that, despite the major upheaval of the Meiji Restoration and the modernization process that followed, society has [since] experienced no fundamental structural change.'<sup>3</sup>

It is easy to go one step further and argue that the national character of the Japanese did not only develop during the Edo period, but in Edo itself. The

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1 Professor Gunji Masakatsu in Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, 204.

2 Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, 3. Professor Nakane Chie wrote as a social anthropologist at Tōkyō University.

3 Nakane, *Tokugawa Japan*, 3, p.7.



city was a powerful influence and source of ideas and fashion for the other two main cities, Ōsaka and Kyôto, and indeed even for the most remote rural areas. The customs and daily life of Edo became the ideal towards which all Japanese strove, wherever they lived. Edo in this way acted as a catalyst which irrevocably transformed Japanese life. The inhabitants of Edo did not carry out this alone. There was significant interaction between the centre and the domains. The presence of the daimyô and their retainers contributed to the vitality of Edo culture, in the same way that the funds which they spent during their stay in the city contributed to its economic vitality. As a result, regardless of the contradictions inherent in Tokugawa Japan as simultaneously a strong and weak state, Edo culture rapidly established itself as a national culture and, for this reason, became a unifying factor which in the late Edo period possibly did more to sustain national government than national government itself.

Since no mobilisation for war took place among shogunate forces after 1615, we can only conjecture what the shogunate army would have looked like later in the century, if it had been called to arms. However, we can presume, with some certainty, that senior commanders, loyal daimyô, and those *hatamoto* who could afford it would appear in full suits of armour, mounted on horseback, much as they had in the previous century. Possibly, their suits of armour would have been yet more flamboyant and correspondingly less appropriate for field conditions than in the past. Moreover, with the introduction of horse armour, we can assume that many of their horses would appear in bardings and with elaborate chanfrons.

However, the rank and file would likely have looked quite different. There would probably have been sufficient amounts of old ashigaru gear in storage for the lowest ranks (impoverished *gokenin* and *chûgen*) to go to war in simple, conical war hats (*jingasa*) and, when available, simple cuirasses. With ever-decreasing numbers of muskets supplied to the shogunate armouries, the share of musketeers would probably have been smaller than in the last decades of the sixteenth century, with correspondingly more infantry serving as spearmen or even archers. Still, we can assume that quite many old muskets still would have been serviceable, which would have enabled the shogunate to field some dedicated units of musketeers.

Their officers would have looked very different from those of sixteenth century. Some would have brought old heirloom suits of armour, or at least bits and pieces of old armour, into the field. Yet, most would probably have looked more similar to the Akô rônin of 1703, dressed in chainmail coats (*kusari katabira*), armoured sleeves with half-gauntlets, and shin guards, most of it worn under their civilian clothing. There would have been a sprinkling of the stiffened sleeveless *jinbaori*, mixed with more civilian types of coats such as the soft, sleeved civilian *haori*. For head protection, they would likely have employed a variety of styles ranging from the trendy 'horseman's war hat' (*bajôjingasa*) of lacquered wood to the fireman's helmet (*kaji kabuto*) or half-helmet (*hanburi* or *hachigane*) of plate, supported by a fire neckguard (*hikeshi shikoro*) or a chainmail hood (*kusari zukin*). They would have been armed with swords, spears, and some glaives (*naginata*), with the occasional longbow among them. Firearms would not have been common.

Most cavalrymen, who likely would have been few in numbers, would have looked much the same as the infantry officers. Wealthier officers would have worn more old-style armour and the occasional matchlock carbine or pistol. The shogunate still had some expert horsemen, but in the Edo period, far more samurai were accustomed to depend fully on a groom to walk next to them, leading the horse. To make such a gathering of men into an efficient cavalry force would have taken time.

There would have been some cannons, but since the artillerymen practiced firing their weapons only rarely, if at all, the artillery would have been in far worse shape than the cavalry. Artillerymen would likely have shown up in similar dress as the infantry.

In short, the shogunate army would have presented a flamboyant and occasionally splendid appearance, yet it would have few unit structures beyond that of the feudal combat team and armament that came in all forms, sizes, and calibres. From a logistics viewpoint, the shogunate army would have been a quartermaster's nightmare. There is no reason to question such an army's courage, had it been called to arms. The warrior legacy would have ensured that the men fought bravely, even though most would have lacked both experience and training. The shogunate army would have had far more of the characteristics of a levy of townsmen than of a regular army.

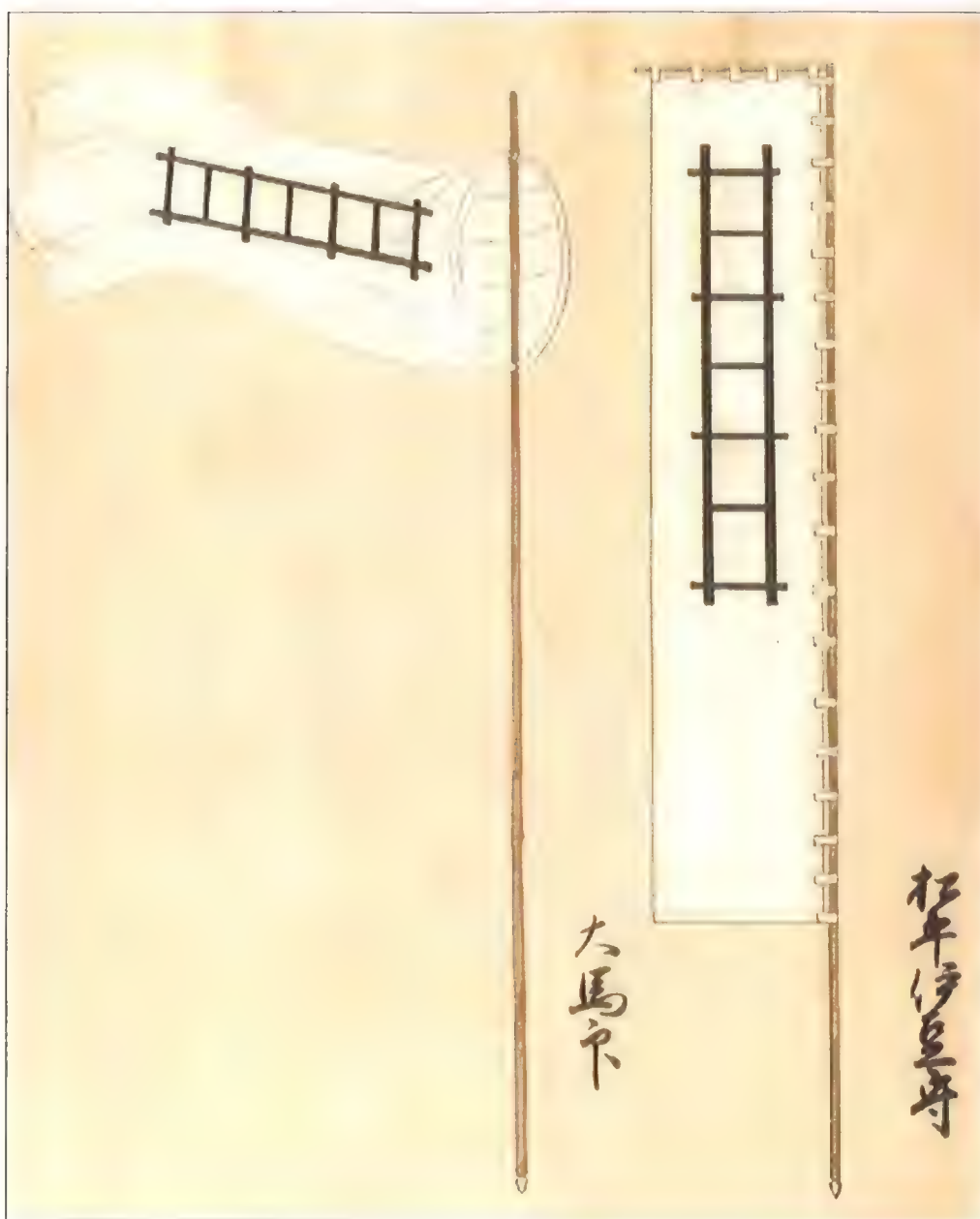
First Shôgun Tokugawa Ieyasu had moved his retainers into Edo because he worried that the sophisticated living and fine arts of the imperial capital, Kyôto, would corrupt the simple warrior virtues of his men. Third Shôgun Iemitsu must have realised that the policy to move the Tokugawa clan army into Edo, despite its good intention, had been the first step in its self-destruction. Despite most samurai retaining their status as members of the warrior class, and despite the fact that no formal demobilisation ever took place, the move to Edo in the long run ensured that the samurai became townsmen. Not in the legal sense (although there were exceptions), but certainly in practical terms. Military and civilian culture merged, and it was civilian culture which came out on top. The shogunate soldiers who remained on active duty soon transformed into civil servants. The samurai class remained but its role in society changed. The soldier had become a civilian.



Left: Banner of Tokugawa Yorifusa (1603–1661), Ieyasu's son and founder of the Mito branch of the Tokugawa clan. Black and white stripes with gold square, with pendant in the same design.

Right: Battle standard of Tokugawa Yorinobu (1602–1671), Ieyasu's son and founder of the Kii branch of the Tokugawa clan. Golden-capped black staff with golden plaited paper streamers.

(Source: *Hata umajirushi ezu* ('Illustrated Banners and Battle Standards'), late seventeenth century)



**Left:** Battle standard of Matsudaira Nobutsuna (1596–1662), the shogunate commander at Shimabara in 1638. White windsock with black ladder.

**Right:** Banner of Matsudaira Nobutsuna (1596–1662), the shogunate commander at Shimabara in 1638. White banner with black ladder.

(Source: *Hata umajirushi ezu* ('Illustrated Banners and Battle Standards'), late seventeenth century)



**Battle standard of Matsudaira Nobutsuna (1596–1662), the shogunate commander at Shimabara in 1638. White folded paper ornaments on bamboo broom.**

(Source: *Hata umajirushi ezu* ('Illustrated Banners and Battle Standards'), late seventeenth century)



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